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THE HIDDEN PRINCESS



J. Graham Cullen
1913

FRED JACKSON



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THE HIDDEN PRINCESS



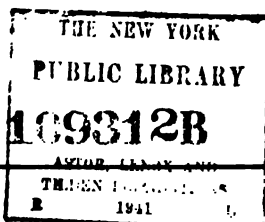
THE HIDDEN PRINCESS

A
Modern
Romance

BY
FRED
JACKSON

PHILADELPHIA
GEORGE W. JACOBS & CO.
PUBLISHERS

1910



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TO

MY FATHER AND MOTHER
AND ONE OTHER

20/2/20

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The Hidden Princess

CHAPTER I

A THING CALLED CHIVALRY

As young Bradhurst leaped to his feet to face De Larres, a little hush fell upon the group of men gathered about the table, and in the silence the even ticking of the great wooden clock in the corner sounded ominously. The grill of the club was deserted, save for this knot of men and a servant who was wearily prodding the dying fire into renewed activity; and but for the ruddy glow from the tortured logs and the shaded candle-light falling full upon the faces of the two men, the long room was in shadow.

"De Larres," said young Bradhurst with a slight smile, his lips tight, his blue eyes

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afire, "you are a lying dog—a gutter cur—not fit to speak that name. I and these gentlemen will listen to any apology you have to offer."

A chorus of smothered exclamations followed his words and the little Frenchman grew livid—then white with rage.

"Do I understand that you appoint yourself the lady's champion?" he asked significantly.

Bradhurst reached out deliberately and struck him upon the point of the jaw, and he went down in a heap upon the polished floor. Instantly, babel ensued. Chairs were thrown over as the rest of the men gained their feet, and the room rang with their protesting voices as they threw themselves between the quarrelers. Bradhurst observed them grimly, his hands clenched, his blue eyes blazing from under lowered brows; De Larres struggled to his feet, his breath coming hard, his face dull red where Bradhurst's blow had landed, and his small eyes smoldered beneath half-dropped lids.



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"Milord Bradhurst," he gasped, "you 'ave pairmeet yourself to strak me—as one strak one's groom—*me—Viscount De Larres!* Eef I ware of you Eengleesh—I should strak back—as your costoms are—bot we French—we 'ave anothair way. We fight lak men—weeth swords—peestols—what you weel!" His glance swept the circle of faces in search of one less unfriendly than the rest, and he selected Carstairs, who stood close to the table, his arms folded, a frown in his eyes. "May I ask you, *Monsieur* Carstairs, to sairve me?"

"A—duel?" cried Carstairs gravely. "Rot! What fool idea is that?"

"Bot—*certainment*—a duel," protested De Larres, with a shrug, his fine linen handkerchief pressed to his ashen lips. "Nos-seeng bot blood can wipe out soch a blow, *Messieurs.*"

With troubled faces, the little group of men regarded one another, but Billy Burr seized young Bradhurst by the arm and shook him affectionately.

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“Bully for you, old man,” he cried in a whisper. “You did what I wanted to do—but—I’d apologize if I were you.”

“*Apologize?*” repeated Bradhurst, staring, and not lowering his voice. “Do you want me to admit that his lying insinuation is true?”

“This thing has got to be quieted some way,” insisted Billy, still under his breath, “for Eleanore’s sake, you know. An apology would be the quickest way. Think of her position if you fight him!”

“Think of her position if I don’t!” answered Bradhurst grimly. Then he included the others with a sweeping glance. “You heard the name he applied, didn’t you? You heard him malign one of the bravest, truest, sweetest women in the world. I must teach him that men do not handle a lady’s name that way in England.”

“But—a duel!” cried Carstairs again. “The town will ring with the scandal tomorrow—and—her name will be on every-

one's tongue. That's got to be prevented, Penn."

"It's gone too far for that, I'm afraid," said Bradhurst; "And if the town talks, it shall have something to talk about. I mean to kill the little cur. One does not settle an account amicably with a spider that bites, or a snake that stings." He was speaking quite impersonally, as though De Larres were not present. The little Frenchman's face grew livid, and he trembled with passion at the added insult. The room was so still that as a huge log fell from the brackets with a low moan and expired in a shower of golden sparks, every man started—every one, that is, save Bradhurst. He was too intent upon the matter in hand to observe trifles.

"Will you act as my second, Billy?" asked Bradhurst slowly.

Burr nodded, his eyes lighting with sudden interest.

"As the challenged person," went on Bradhurst smoothly, "I name the weapon

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—swords—or foils with the button removed. I can work quite as effectively with them, and we could attribute his death afterwards to accidental causes. I name the time—now—in Henderson's up-stairs room. This is not precisely according to code, perhaps, but I shall sleep better for having relieved my mind and a day more or less cannot matter to De Larres unless he desires time to put his affairs in order?"

Billy Burr glanced inquiringly at Carstairs, unmindful of the chorus of protests behind him.

"Are you content with the arrangements my principal desires?" he asked. Carstairs' eyes met De Larres.

"Quite," answered De Larres with more composure, favoring Billy Burr with a low bow. "We 'ave, as Milord Bradhurst remarks, verged somew'at from ze path ze code of 'onair lays down for us, bot I see no objection to soch a course."

Young Bradhurst breathed a little sigh of content.

“Good!” he cried. “We have time enough. It’s just twelve-forty-five. We’ll not have to knock the old man up. To Henderson’s, gentlemen.” The others followed at his heels, through the long shadowy grill, up the wide carved stairs, and after an instant out into solid blackness of a London night. There were no stars visible, for a damp fog was beginning to fall over the sleeping city. The street-lights two blocks away, were already fading into impenetrable gloom and the nearer houses were mysterious shadow-shapes shrinking back into obscurity. The air was cool and damp with the smell of the fog.

They set off for Henderson’s in two parties. De Larres and Carstairs and three others in a four-wheeler, and the rest in Bradhurst’s big motor. Arrived, they brought the old man smiling from the back room and speedily made terms for the use of the second floor. It had originally been designed for four rooms, but the intersecting walls had been torn down to transform

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the whole floor into one, and various green covered tables and other paraphernalia standing about indicated for what purpose it was used.

A space was now cleared in the center of the room so that neither adversary could claim advantage; the buttons were wrenched from a pair of foils and laying them across his arm as he had seen player-folk do, Billy Burr offered a weapon to each combatant in turn. Bradhurst and De Larres then removed their coats and waistcoats, and Bradhurst ripped open his sleeve from cuff to shoulder to give his sword arm freer play but the Frenchman folded his neatly back. Then, with a grave salute, they began to fence.

Carstairs half sat, half leaned upon a large baize covered table, his eyes fixed frowningly upon the two men; Burr sat beside him, his hands gripping the table at either side of him and his eyes were alight with interest and anticipation. He had seen Bradhurst fence once—years before—and he trusted

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him. The other men were formed in a carelessly drawn circle about the duellists, seated or standing as their fancy dictated, their dull black coats and white shirtfronts forming a striking background for the two white-shirted figures. The duellists themselves, stared into each other's eyes and fought with the blood-lust behind them. It was a close match. A man can fence well when his life is in the balance, and both men knew that they fought for no less a prize. Without discussion, they had come to that agreement. No quarter was to be given or accepted. An instinctive dislike had gripped Bradhurst the first time he had met De Larres—a dislike which further knowledge of the man had in no way decreased—and the Frenchman, for no reason in the world, returned the feeling. So the earth had become too small to hold them both and one must go on into the beyond.

Once, De Larres ripped Bradhurst's arm, but it was a flesh-wound that he could disregard in spite of the steady drip of blood

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that trickled down; and once, Bradhurst disarmed De Larres, caught the foil out of his adversary's hand with a wrench that must almost have broken the Frenchman's wrist and sent it flying to the far corner of the room; but he found himself strangely reluctant to kill in cold blood, and as De Larres waited indifferently evidently expecting no quarter, Bradhurst motioned to Billy to return the foil, a thrill of admiration sweeping over him at the scoundrel's physical courage. So they fought on—until both were breathing hard—and the end could no longer be postponed. De Larres was pressing hard, using the Fren-toni method of attack, his eyes fired with a determination to kill, when Bradhurst fainted suddenly, advanced with the Arragassi swing of the arm that only three men know, and his weapon sank almost to the hilt in the Frenchman's side. De Larres fell without a sound, to lie a bloody, shapeless heap in the center of the polished floor.

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At the striking of nine, young Bradhurst opened his eyes with a yawn to find the curtains flung back and his man standing patiently at his bedside.

"Well?" he asked grumbly, smothering a second yawn.

"Your tub, sir," said Wilkins firmly, unafraid of his master's frown. Young Bradhurst sat up and regarded his man, his blue eyes scowling from beneath his fine blond brows.

"What time is it?"

"Nine o'clock, sir."

"*Nine—?*" repeated Bradhurst. "Well, why in *thunder—?*"

"Mr. Burr was here at seven, sir, and he said you were sailing for the States this morning but that I should pack and not disturb you until nine."

"Sailing for the States?" repeated young Bradhurst curiously.

"Yes, sir, but he ordered me to tell no one but you, sir. I haven't, though the doors have been besieged since eight o'clock. All

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the young gentlemen in London have been here, sir."

My Lord Bradhurst stepped out of bed, thrust his bare feet into the highly ornamental mules that stood waiting at the foot of his bed, and crossed to the window in his pale blue pajamas. With his fair hair ruffled and the look of perplexity and wonder on his face, he looked almost like a boy, in spite of his five and twenty years.

London in her early morning dress is never very attractive. This morning following the duel, the city lay completely hidden beneath a blanket of yellow-brown fog, so that it was impossible to see a rod before one's face, though the thousand discordant sounds of the city crept up through the muffling. Young Bradhurst turned from the steaming window with a shiver of disgust.

"Sailing to the States on a day like this!" he growled. "I like his confounded nerve." His Lordship lighted a cigarette with an air of finality.

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"Mr. Burr said he would be back at half after nine, sir, and he hopes to find you dressed."

Young Bradhurst muttered an oath and headed for his bath.

In the studio, Wilkins was packing, and the desk, mantel and walls had already been stripped of his master's personal belongings. Bradhurst was leaving most of his effects behind him—was taking, in fact—only a steamer trunk for clothes and his painting things. What was the use of carrying a hundred and one useless treasures to the forsaken spot for which he was bound? Better send them up to the *mater's* place until they were wanted again.

By the time the little trunk was locked, my Lord Bradhurst had completed his toilet and was preparing to breakfast at the small mahogany stand Wilkins had ready. At the side of his plate lay a bundle of cards—evidently left at the door by those of his friends who had already heard of the mix-up with De Larres—and judging from the

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size of the bundle, half of London must have heard. Such tales have wings.

His Lordship was in the act of spooning a golden melon when the door was uncere-
moniously opened and Mr. Burr appeared.

"Up?" cried Mr. Burr. "Good! Hurry with the breakfast. Her Grace, the Duchess of Dunderry, is waiting in the outer room."

"Eleanore?" cried his Lordship, dropping his napkin and leaping to his feet.

"Yes. Sit down. You may as well finish because she can't come in for a moment anyway. I've got to talk to you."

Mr. Burr sat down upon a small chair, straddle-wise, with his arms resting along the back; the theatrical position suited him admirably, for he was an unusual looking person this morning. He had not changed his formal clothes, though he had drawn a long cravanette over them and was wearing a bowler; he looked rather pale and tired.

"De Larres?" asked Bradhurst, without resuming his seat. "He's—?"

"Not dead—but uncomfortably close to it.

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Sir John says he's likely to start upon the long journey at any moment, so we've decided to get you off at once. It's all over London that you fought over Eleanore."

My Lord Bradhurst cursed conscientiously.

"And she's heard?" he asked. "Of course—"

"She'll be in in a minute," said Billy. "Restrain your impatience, please, and listen to me. I've booked passage on the *Kaiserin* for you. You're leaving this morning. I've a dinky little shooting box in the mountains of New Jersey somewhere—and you can stay there until it's safe to come back. You can go as Mr. Anyone, a protégé of mine and I'll write my aunt that I've loaned the place to you. You are a struggling artist—see? The bungalow is on my aunt's grounds, but about two miles from her picturesque dwelling and you needn't come in contact with her household unless you want to. You can lie low there, until we recall you."

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Young Bradhurst considered his friend admiringly.

"You seem to have it quite settled," he said. "I thought we decided last night that I need only run out to the country for a week or two."

"Things look more serious to-day. If you don't follow my orders without a word, I wash my hands of you. I've lost a night's rest as it is between you and that cursed Frenchman. And now—Eleanore must needs send for me the first thing this morning. I tell you, I won't abide disobedience."

Bradhurst looked thoughtful.

"Is it really serious? Do you think it would be unwise to stay somewhere near at hand?"

"I certainly do. You sail to-day on the *Kaiserin* or you get out of your scrapes yourself, hereafter, if there ever is another one."

Bradhurst sat down and drank his coffee.

"Very well," he said.

"I'll give full instructions to Wilkins and that will afford Eleanore her chance to scold you. Eleanore!" he called, rising and throwing open the door. A tall girl gowned in black came swiftly forward, her thick veil thrown back to frame the glory of her white face, great blue eyes and bright hair. As she advanced, her eyes holding Bradhurst's, Billy Burr escaped closing the door behind him, and the two were left there together.

"Eleanore!" cried Bradhurst.

She studied him without smiling and accepted the chair he placed for her.

"I suppose it was very wrong of me to come here," she said, "but I took precautions as you see, and Billy brought me. I heard about last night—and I wanted to see you."

Bradhurst waited, his arms folded, his blue eyes fixed upon her with something of defiance in them. She noted that, and smiled faintly.

"Your attitude," she said, "indicates that you expect to be reprimanded."

"Billy hinted as much," he smiled, flushing slightly.

"Billy had no authority to hint of my intentions."

"You don't mean—"

She raised her blue eyes slowly to his as he halted, and sitting sidewise, rested one arm upon the back of her chair.

"Why did you fight him?" she asked gravely.

Young Bradhurst flushed again and hesitated. "What have you heard?"

"That doesn't matter. I want the truth, please."

He considered her, and surrendered gracefully.

"He made an unpleasant allusion to you—before some men—at the club."

"Well?"

"If I had remained silent it would have been an admission; I told him he labored under a misapprehension."

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“And then?”

“He repeated the insinuation, directing it at me. And then I knocked him down.”

“And then he challenged?”

“Yes.”

He moved restlessly under her steady gaze as she went on slowly.

“Had you any reason for taking up the gauntlet in my behalf, Penn? Didn’t it occur to you that—that my husband was the proper one to have done that.”

“He wasn’t there,” said Bradhurst eagerly. “It would have been his right, of course, if he had been there—but he was not—and I was. Don’t you think the fact that we have known each other all our lives, that we have always been pals in a way, entitled me to defend you from such an insult? Why—I would have acted precisely the same if it had been any other woman I know, you see. There’s a thing called chivalry that would direct my doing that, Eleanore.”

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"Then—it was just chivalry that prompted you, Penn?"

"I—suppose so."

"That's a rather rare thing to find in men, these days—Chivalry. So few of you seem to know what the word means. Didn't it occur to you that people might misunderstand?"

"Misunderstand?" he repeated frowning.

"London," said Her Grace of Dunderry gravely, "will not accept your explanation, I'm afraid. London can't get your point of view. They will be saying that you are in love with me."

"Eleanore!" he cried, his color rising.

She smiled a cold little smile at his embarrassment.

"Are you in love with me, Penn?" she asked. "I don't believe you would discover it by yourself if you were. Consider a moment. Are you—in love with me?"

"Certainly not," he said with a frown. "Men don't fall in love with other men's

wives—at least—men of my family don't."

"But one hears that love comes and goes at will, defying mastery."

He shook his head. "We've known each other since you wore pigtails and pinafores," he said. "And we were the best possible pals until—you married. Can't you see that *that* is why I defended you, Eleanore? Isn't that reason enough?"

She looked up steadily into his eyes, and hers were the first to drop. A very faint flush crept up under her white skin as the lashes fell, and she drew in her breath sharply—or sighed—I cannot be sure which.

"Yes," she said, slowly, "I suppose—that would be—reason enough."

For an instant, an awkward silence fell between them, then Her Grace, the Duchess of Dunderry, ended it decisively.

"You must forgive me for saying these things to you, Penn, but—there was a reason why I had to know—why I wanted to know. Maybe you can guess it, if you can't, I may tell you some other time."


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He nodded slightly, but she saw that he did *not* understand.

“Good-bye,” she said. “I can’t thank you for what you’ve done for me. I can thank a man for picking up my handkerchief, for opening a door for me, for returning my fan, for bringing me an ice. It would shame what you’ve done for me—a miserable little ‘thank-you’; but if you could know what I think of it, Penn.” She caught her breath again, and he saw that her eyes were wet, that tears hung upon her long golden lashes; then she held out her hands and he pressed them in his, and turning swiftly, she went from the room. Bradhurst strode to the window, his hands deep in his trouser pockets, and standing there, staring out into the blank wall of fog, he cursed roundly.

Wilkins’ deprecatory cough at his elbow recalled him. The valet, already arrayed for the street, was holding Bradhurst’s coat.

“The box has gone, sir,” he said, “and Mr. Burr is waiting at the door. He begs that you will make haste, sir.”



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Bradhurst got into his coat, accepted his hat from Wilkins and tugging at his gloves, went quickly down the stairs. A few minutes later, he stepped into the motor and took his seat beside Billy, Wilkins climbed up beside the chauffeur, the door slammed shut, and his lordship sped off into exile.





CHAPTER II
CUPID GOES A-HUNTING

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CUPID GOES A-HUNTING

The first few days of his exile passed pleasantly enough for Bradhurst. He loved the sea devotedly—in all her moods. When it was calm and the sun was up, he would sit and smoke on the forward deck with a book on his knee—though he rarely read—and he would watch the rise and fall of the waves for hours; but when the sea was wild and there were great dark clouds hanging low over the water, he would pace against the wind and laugh when the spray reached him. He understood the rages of the great waters as well as her smiles.

During those first long days when there were none of his pals near him, he got to thinking over his twenty-five years; got to recalling all that he had lived in them, for

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he had lived. He had run off from school when he was still in his 'teens, his young heart thirsty for adventure, and had gone out to India to his father who had been quartered there at the time. There was a strain of wild red blood in the family somewhere (it was supposed to come from a Hungarian princess that one of Bradhurst's ancestors had married ages before) and Penniston's share of it had come out in his eager thirst for life. They were none of them dreamers, though the Bradhursts, they had been—for the most part—clean livers, true lovers and brave fighters, all.

The young runaway had not met with the cordial welcome he had expected from his parent, so he had taken the hint and had gone promptly back to his books again, content with that one little taste of coming sweets. Afterwards, he had tried ranching in Australia, but when the novelty died, his interest ended and then the outbreak of the war afforded him a splendid opportunity to try his luck at soldiering. He enlisted and

during two short encounters, distinguished himself for bravery, but a malignant fever cut short his promising campaign, and he was speedily shipped home for nursing. Then the death of his father put an end to his escapades, and he had settled down to live the London life, to tread wearily through the round of clubs and teas and dinners and balls, though the wanderlust never quite lost its grip upon him, and at intervals when life became monotonous he disappeared for a trip to somewhere or other out of the world, or travelled over to Paris where he lived among the students in the Latin Quartier and learned to paint, and lived on nothing a day, pretending that he was a poor, ambitious seeker of fame like the rest. He had rather a notable talent for the work; some of his masters even declared he might have made a name for himself if he had not been born to one.

Accordingly, upon the steamship *Kaiserin*, he travelled as Mr. Edgar Penniston, a painter (his name really was Edgar Pen-

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niston Bradhurst, though he had always been called Penniston), and thanks to Wilkins' habit of addressing him as "sir" in place of the customary "my lord" he succeeded in retaining his incognito intact.

The bungalow which Billy Burr had loaned him stood high in the mountains overlooking the Hudson, and was quite as secure a hiding place as one could desire. The one habitation within about two miles was a tremendous, gray-stone Fairy castle sort of place that looked as though it had been transported thither from the pages of a Fairy-book. Never in all his life had Bradhurst seen such a dwelling. There were, at the corners, tall square towers, ending in look-outs at the top; a deep, very wide moat surrounded the huge building, and a drawbridge separating the house from the rest of the world. Ivy clambered over the walls (which had the dull, sober look of extreme age) and through a glass (it must be confessed at once that Bradhurst was guilty of using one), could be seen extensive rose

gardens. These, however, were visible only when the drawbridge was down and the great gates thrown wide to permit the passage of a carriage or motor. At other times, the place had the look of a feudal castle in a state of defense. It was evident, that Billy's aunt must be an unusual sort of woman, and the one glimpse that Bradhurst had of her (it was on his second day in the mountains, when she had passed him in her motor and he had caught a glimpse of the rose-gardens), proved her to be no less remarkable than her home. She was a small old lady, with a very large, beaked nose, a broad mouth, very black eyes and very white hair. She dressed in black—though her gown seemed to be made of very rich material—and beside her in her motor, stood an ebony cane with a filligree silvered top. Altogether, she was an awe-inspiring figure.

Bradhurst wondered about her a great deal as he tramped through the mountains, exploring the neighborhood and revelling

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in the glorious scenery. He hadn't much to occupy himself with, you see. He had brought no books with him in his forced exile. He hadn't had time to think of that; but he had his painting things, and later on, after he began to know the surroundings intimately, he set up his easel, and began to do the Fairy castle, with the ruddy glow of sunset bathing the walls. As he painted, he wondered about the old lady of the castle. Billy had never mentioned her, so young Bradhurst knew nothing at all about her, save that she was, of course, the owner of the bungalow (it stood on her grounds) and what bothered him was that she was conscientiously ignoring his presence there. Billy had said he would notify her—besides, she must have seen him that day that her motor passed him in the road. He was a sociable chap, was Bradhurst, and he was beginning to feel wretchedly lonely in his wilderness—quite like Adam, he imagined, before the coming of Eve. (This fancy was suggested to him by the name of the nearest

station—Eden—and he had a habit of chaffing himself with it.)

So the first three weeks of his exile passed, changing Bradhurst from a sleek, well-groomed young man-about-town to a carelessly clothed artist in an old pair of riding trousers, a dark blue corduroy coat and a dark blue corduroy cap set any way at all upon his blond head. (I wonder if Adam made a very careful toilet before Eve came!)

Having nothing to do but to eat, and sleep, and tramp through the woods and to paint, young Bradhurst arranged his time so that he could enjoy all of those occupations, and he was just settling down comfortably into this rather unusual life, when the diversion occurred. She—necessarily, it was a girl—was a milkmaid, a lithe, slender creature with wide startled brown-black eyes, fringed with thick curved lashes; a mouth all witchery and laughing curves, a straight little nose, a rounded chin, and a wealth of shining, glistening chestnut hair. Her

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gingham gown was neatly laundered, and cut to display the fine curves of her form and the wonderful texture and whiteness of her throat where the blue stuff fell away. A stiff sunbonnet hung down upon her neck, leaving her shining head bare, and as she broke through the underbrush, in pursuit of her cow, and stopped to stare in bewilderment, young Bradhurst so far forgot himself as to stare back—candidly—in utter amazement. She was so startlingly lovely—so simply incomparable. He could do nothing but clench his hands and catch his breath and stare and stare. So it was the milkmaid who spoiled the tableau. She had halted, half way through the bushes, her head tilted up, her big eyes full of wonder, but at the sight of his apparent enchantment, she broke into a peal of laughter and stepped out into the road before him. The second cow with listless tread and tinkling bell, followed her and stood switching her tail in the sun (the first cow had preceded the lady—knocking over Bradhurst's easel in her un-

expected advent from the bushes) and a small Japanese poodle with a little bell on his neck tied on with a pale blue ribbon, brought up the rear of the procession, barking joyfully, and wagging his tail. The milkmaid spoke.

"I hope you'll pardon our intrusion," she said. "We didn't know you'd made this your studio—and Mary is *so* impulsive." She shook her head with a little sigh that scarcely stirred her bosom, and glanced reproachfully at the first cow, who had immediately seated herself unasked.

"Don't mention it," cried Bradhurst, whipping off his cap at last, and relegating his pipe to regions unknown. "Won't you stay a moment—now that you've come? I'm wretchedly lonesome."

She faced him seriously.

"You're sure you are not asking us just to be polite—because Mary took the liberty to sit down? It is very rude of her but royal persons are so difficult."

"Royal persons?" he repeated.

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“Mary Queen of Scots, you know—because she’s selfish, and impulsive and easily led but very whimsical and uncertain. Occasionally, she loses her head.”

He laughed, placing the stool for her, but she shook her head and sank down upon the warm grass and fern.

“Who is the other lady?” he asked.

“Marie Antoinette—because she’s sweet and simple and dignified but rather helpless. Do you like cows?”

“Tremendously,” cried Bradhurst. It had never occurred to him before, but he was quite certain at that instant that he *did* harbor an especial fondness for them.

“I do, too—they’re so grave and silent and meditative and dreamy—and so kind.” She leaned back against the tree-trunk, clasping her arms about her knees and he marvelled at the picture that she made. He had never before in his life felt so utterly unequal to a situation and he had never wanted so much to appear to advantage. And all the while, he was wondering vaguely

whether she was creating such havoc because she was the first girl he had seen in three weeks or because she was really so perfect as she seemed.

"Did Mary spoil the painting?" asked the girl, after an instant, watching him as he recovered the canvas and examined it.

"No. Would you like to see it?"

At her eager nod, he held it out, standing so that he could see her face. She uttered a little cry of delight, her red lips apart, her eyes wide and shining, and hugged her knees.

"It's *wonderful*," she cried. Young Bradhurst flushed and smiled at her enthusiasm.

"Not at all—it's just merely good. I could do a great deal better work if you would pose for me."

"Could you?" she asked innocently. "Why?" She was not coquetting; she was in earnest. For an instant, he was utterly confounded—then he rallied!

"There isn't any reason. Some models can inspire an artist to paint a masterpiece

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and some make his brush heavy and paralyze his power. An artist can tell to which class people belong as soon as he sees them." He flattered himself that he had gotten out of the muddle neatly.

"And do I belong to the first class?" she asked eagerly.

"You do," Bradhurst assured her.

She breathed a contented little sigh.

"When do you want me to pose?" she asked simply. Bradhurst reflected.

"When can you come?"

"Oh—any time. I can bring the cows over this way to pasture and sit for you while I watch them."

"Good! We'll begin to-morrow, then. Can you come every day?"

"If you need me."

"I can't paint a stroke without you," he assured her emphatically. "You're sure the—eh—what in thunder is her name?"

"Whose—name?" She looked up at him curiously.

"The little old lady of the castle. That's

where you belong, isn't it?" He waved his arm vaguely toward the Fairy castle standing out in high relief against the red-gold sky behind it.

"Yes . . . I'm milkmaid there. Her name is Mrs. Sarah Van der Griffit but most people call her the 'Griffin' because—"

"I know," interrupted Bradhurst nodding, "because she looks it."

"Well—not only that. She's a very strong will—and often a—a really evil temper, you know. I'm very much afraid of her myself though she's been splendid to me—and I love her—in a way."

"She must be an unusual sort of person," said Bradhurst.

"I suppose she is," said the girl. She looked sombrely reflective, a shadow in her dark eyes.

"Whatever makes her live alone, closed up in that strange looking house?" he asked idly, lying on the grass at her feet and watching her.

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"Why shouldn't she? It's a beautiful house—quite like Fairyland inside."

"And outside, too," said Bradhurst, his eyes wandering from the girl's rapt face, to the huge pile of stone, and then back again, "but it must be terribly lonely to spend one's life away from civilization this way."

"Is civilization so nice?" asked the girl thoughtfully.

"Well—*isn't it?*" he asked in return.

She shrugged and sighed softly. "I don't know. I've never been away from 'Balleyhoo.' "

" 'Balleyhoo'?"

"The castle, there."

Bradhurst sat up in his astonishment, and regarded her incredulously.

"Do you mean that you have *never* been outside of these mountains?"

"Once I was in Eden—just for a *little* visit. I've never been further than that."

Her dark eyes were fixed upon him so candidly, and with so much sincerity that it

was impossible for him to doubt her. He stared.

"But—your manner—your voice—your—Haven't you been to school?"

"I've had the freedom of the library at 'Balleyhoo' and there are *millions* of books there. Besides—people teach me things."

"What people?"

"Everyone who comes to 'Balleyhoo' teaches me at least *one* thing. It is possible to learn even from—from a cow, you know, if one were to think of it."

He was studying her, now, with undivided attention, his interest aroused. At first, her beauty had caught his eyes, and the artist in him had bowed down before her manifold perfections. The artist had surrendered at sight, but the man's attention had not been caught. The man stood aloof, even at twenty-five, too wise to expect more treasures than the ones that fade. But now, his interest quickened at the glimpse of the girl.

"Were you born at 'Balleyhoo'?" he asked.

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"No, but I came here as a very small child and I scarcely remember any other life but this. Have you lived in many places?"

"Quite a few," answered Bradhurst reflectively.

The girl propped her chin in her hands, and elbows upon knees, sat watching him for a moment or two with knitted brows, her dark eyes serious.

"Doesn't one pay one's model?" she asked at length, in a very grave voice.

"Why—certainly." Young Bradhurst flushed at the sudden change of theme.

"I should think that the satisfaction of inspiring a picture would be recompense enough," she said thoughtfully, and then after another pause. "But since it is customary—I think you must pay me, too. You shall pay me—by telling me about all the places you have ever been to and all the people you have ever known. Will you?"

He hesitated. "I'm not much of a storyteller."

"No—you look more like a man who would live his stories."

"How do you know that? You surely haven't learned *that* from books."

"Partly—and partly I can tell by instinct, I suppose. Will you pay me in entertainment, then? That is the one condition under which I will pose."

"Then I must consent. You have the whip handle." He laughed up into her eyes frankly. She nodded with evident satisfaction.

"You'll be like a wonderful new book," she said, "only much more satisfactory than a book, because I shall be able to ask you questions. Have many interesting things happened to you? I hope I haven't made a bad bargain."

"Some," said Bradhurst, modestly, determining to invent any hairbreadth escapes and romantic adventures that might later be found necessary to hold his model.

She looked her content at this assurance,

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two perfectly astounding dimples appearing at the corners of her mouth.

"What countries have you visited?" She assumed the air of a pedagogue as she asked the question, frowning severely, and making a grimace that caused young Bradhurst to shout with laughter.

"Countries?" he repeated vaguely. "Let me see . . . England, Japan, France, the United States, India—wait a minute—South Africa, Australia—"

"Such a *lot!*" she cried, "and you look so young. . . . You must have begun to travel very early in life."

"I did," said Bradhurst meekly.

"In which country were you born?" she asked, after a thoughtful pause.

"In England."

"Is it as nice as this?" She indicated the mountains about them with a flash of her eyes.

"Not nearly so nice."

She let her eyes wander meditatively over the scenery, her slender arched brows

lowered, and Bradhurst watched her, wondering what sort of thoughts fermented behind that intense look. Finally, she turned back to him with a faint sigh.

"It must be nice to be quite absolutely free," she said. "Able to go anywhere you please, I mean—able to do exactly as you like—to leave a place, if it doesn't satisfy you, and travel on to some place that *does*. I should think birds would be mighty happy."

He frowned slightly, in sympathy.

"Aren't you happy?" he asked.

"Not entirely." She confessed it with a faint blush, her dark eyes widening until the lashes lay against her cheek.

"Don't you like it here?" He indicated the castle and the mountains with a glance.

"Yes, I love it but I want to see other places, too. I don't like having to stay always in one place, and to—to—" She stopped suddenly with a startled look as though she had almost said too much, and she made no attempt to complete the sen-

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tence. Instead, she rose abruptly and her mood changed. She was laughing again, the dimples peeped out, her eyes were wells of witchery.

"They'll think I've run away again," she said mischievously, "and there'll be *such* excitement. Come, Mary! Jappy, get up this instant, you sleepy-head! Marie Antoinette! *Attendez-vous, si vous plait, Madame la Reine!*" She brought her companions to order with a little stamp of her small foot and a snap of her white fingers, slipped on her sunbonnet and waved to Bradhurst.

"Until to-morrow," she said. "Don't forget the bargain, please." Then she parted the bushes on the far side of the road, called to Mary Queen of Scots, and disappeared. Marie Antoinette and Jappy followed obediently behind her, and Bradhurst, watching, saw the little procession appear and disappear several times (as the roadway directed) until the drawbridge dropped and they passed across and vanished finally into the huge stone-gateway.

He fancied that she waved her hand back to him just before the gate closed upon her, but he could not be quite sure; and then the sun went down, but Bradhurst did not observe that. He thought that the sudden darkness that fell upon the land was due to the disappearance of a slender, girlish figure in a sunbonnet and a blue gingham gown.

CHAPTER III
THE ROAD TO EDEN

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THE ROAD TO EDEN

For some years, young Bradhurst had been in the habit of sleeping late, and once formed, this is a very difficult habit to break. Accordingly, it was very much past sunrise when his lordship awoke upon the following morning, and he fumed and swore and expressed his dissatisfaction with himself and things generally throughout his toilet; but his cold bath put him in a little better humor, and after the hot tea that Wilkins had waiting for him, he began to realize that life was not without its compensations.

With his painting things under his arm, and the stool dangling in one hand, he strode eagerly up the mountain path, humming joyfully to himself. He was clean-shaven to-day, and his knock-about things had been

brushed until they shone with an astounding freshness; his hair was *not* ruffled, and his loose cravat was tied with a studied carelessness that was most effective.

It was, he thought, ample proof of her artlessness and utter simplicity that she was there before him. A girl raised among the absurd practices and customs and conventions of her kind, would not have been discovered in the act of waiting for a man, even if she *had* arrived first at the trysting. But this little milkmaid was placidly regardless of pretense. She sat beneath the same tree that had shaded her yesterday, little flecks of sunlight falling through the heavy green foliage over her crisp gown, dreaming face and shining head. The sunbonnet was thrown back, the eyes were raised to gaze broodingly into space, the hands lay idly clasped over an open book in her lap. Bradhurst, studying her, unseen, was caught by the unconscious grace and significance of the pose. In the foreground, was the girl, dreaming over her open book, around her

the sunlit woods, and high above her in the background, the Fairy castle, half in sunshine, half in shadowy mist. It could be lined in vaguely—that castle—so that in the canvas one could not be certain whether it was just scenery or the center of the girl's thoughts. And he would call the picture "Castles in Spain." That would mark out the meaning.

He broke through the bushes into the roadway, softly, and spoke to her before she discovered him.

"Don't move, please," he said. "You've fallen into a splendid position unconsciously—a much better one than we could invent. Good morning." He ended with a swift smile, as he stuck his cap back on his head again, and began to set up his easel. She smiled dazzlingly back at him, meeting his eyes as frankly as a child might.

"Good morning. You are very late. You cannot have been so anxious to paint me, after all. I have been waiting *hours*."

"I always sleep late," he complained in-

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geniously, "especially when I want to get up early. The only times I *can't* sleep are times I have nothing to do."

"I hate to sleep," she mused idly, watching him. "It is so much precious time wasted. To think that one must lose almost half of one's life in unconsciousness."

"It *is* a bore," observed Bradhurst.

"Particularly when one doesn't dream," she added. "*That* is amusing sometimes. Do you believe in dreams?"

"Day dreams," he smiled.

She sat silent for an instant, thinking. A decided characteristic of hers was that she allowed these little pauses to occur whenever she desired to consider a new thought.

"Do all men believe in day dreams?" she asked finally, with wide thoughtful eyes.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Bradhurst, his attention centered upon his palette.

"Why don't you?"

"Why—I've never stopped to think of it, that's all, I suppose." He looked up with

a slight smile, and his eyes lingered on the perfect repose in every line and tint of her.

"Aren't you interested in people?" asked the girl gravely.

"In some people."

His smile deepened perceptibly.

"I'm interested in *all* people," she observed, her red lips parting, her eyes growing simply enormous. "I'm interested in the most insignificant, uninteresting ones alive—I'm interested in *everything* in the world."

"Even in cows," said Bradhurst whimsically.

She nodded, smiling, now—a very faint, questioning smile.

"How tremendously busy you must be, with such widespread interests," he marvelled shaking his head.

"Of course I can't be properly interested in most things," she added wistfully, "because I've been locked in here so much. Are things really at all like what books say they are?"



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"Depends on what books you have in mind," replied Bradhurst.

"I'm afraid you are cynical," she said reproachfully. "Are you?"

"I hope not." He began to mix his pigments, squinting down at them critically.

"It's so silly to be cynical," she told him, "or pessimistic or anything of that sort. It's like shutting one's eyes and insisting that light has ceased to exist."

"You do have ideas about things, don't you," said Bradhurst.

"Doesn't everyone?" she wanted to know.

"Rather not. It's too difficult to formulate them. Most people just accept things—believe what everyone else believes, you know."

She pondered that for a moment or two in silence.

"Am I very different from the girls you've met in the world?" she asked, then, quite simply. He looked at her, and wished he might tell her how different she *was*, enumerating every single difference.

"Yes," he answered.

"Nicer or not so nice?" she asked anxiously, absolutely guiltless of guile.

Young Bradhurst flushed.

"Much nicer."

"I'm glad I'm nice," she reflected, with a contented little sigh, as one would say "I'm glad the sun is out." There was not the least hint of pride mingled with her content.

"How under heaven did they bring you up so lacking in conceit?" he asked her, dropping his palette arm and staring at her wonderingly.

"I'm not lacking in conceit, but I'm conceited only about things I've done myself—things I'm responsible for."

"Oh!" he ejaculated, blankly.

"It's as absurd to be conceited because one is nice or because one is pleasant to look at, as it is to be conceited because one is tall, or healthy, or because grass is green. One has nothing to *do* with these things oneself. *Why* take the credit?" Her eyes,

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meeting his directly, defied him to give her a good and sufficient reason, and he admitted his helplessness with a shrug.

She stirred slightly, dropped her lashes and smoothed the velvety cover of the leather-bound book on her knee.

"Head up, please," ordered Bradhurst. "I'm going to begin, now. Are you quite comfortable?"

"Quite," she told him, her eyes fixing themselves upon a huge tree just beyond his left shoulder, every line of her rigid. He brushed back his light hair distractedly, the corners of his mouth twitching.

"It isn't necessary that you remain absolutely *immovable*," he said. "If you sit just as comfortably as you were when I found you, I shall get on beautifully, really."

"I don't mind," she said, stealing an eager little side-glance at him. He pondered the situation; then carefully dipping the handiest brush he had into the handiest pigment, he began to touch the canvas very

lightly here and there, as though he were starting to work. He simply hadn't the heart to tell her how strained and unnatural her position now was. He intended to have her relax unconsciously, so as he squinted seriously at the canvas, and waved the brush, he asked:—

“What shall—I tell you about first? I mean to keep my part of the bargain faithfully, you see.”

A light kindled suddenly in her dark eyes, but she maintained her rigid position conscientiously and her lips scarcely moved as she answered him.

“Anything,” she said. “I shall be interested in anything you tell.”

“Then,” he decided promptly, “suppose I sketch out my life for you, and tell about all the countries and people as I come to them. That will keep things in their proper order. Do you like the plan?”

She forgot herself for an instant so far as to nod; he took courage and began somewhat hesitatingly and uncertainly at first,

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to sketch out his rather commonplace boyhood at Bourneheathe—his school-fellows—his masters—the people who lived round about—the people who came down for the week-ends and for longer visits. Once the king had been there, and he told her about that. His manner grew more assured as he proceeded and the narrative kept gaining in interest. It was like Fairy-land to the girl—this peep into the unknown world that she had read about and wondered about all her life—and forgetting utterly her desire to be a good model, the rigidity of her pose relaxed, she leaned slightly back until her shining head almost rested against the thick black tree-trunk, and with her hands clasped over her book, her lips parted, her eyes fixed wistfully upon him, she listened. She hardly dared breathe lest he stop the wonderful story and when Bradhurst suddenly stopped short in dismay, remembering his incognito and realizing how much he was disclosing in his wild efforts to hold her attention, she gave in a hushed voice, the

solemn oath of secrecy he demanded, and her bliss became complete.

Meanwhile, in spite of his labors as *raconteur*, Bradhurst had not forgotten to paint, and the picture was growing under his deft brush with inconceivable rapidity. He worked as he had never been able to work before—at first with coarse, broad, sweeping brush-lines that he might catch the spirit of the thing before her self-consciousness returned to her. She was holding the precise position he wanted; in her eyes was the wistful, dreaming light, the parted lips, the up-tilted head, the tenseness of the clasped hands all told of her absorption in her vision. It was more than he had hoped for, and his heart beat fast with the fear that he might lose it.

But eventually, he appreciated the power his story was wielding, and he adopted his usual smooth method, building up his tale as carefully as he built up his picture. It was a fearful task, demanding every ounce of energy in him, but he worked valiantly;

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and all the while, the girl sat quite motionless, listening. She might have been Joan of Arc, hearkening to the Saintly voices, so rapt was she. Neither the cracking of twigs, nor Jappy's excited bark—nor even the awkward stumbling of Marie Antoinette could draw her fascinated eyes from him. The woods behind her might have caught fire and burned away without disturbing her, I verily believe.

But life is made up of meetings and partings, beginnings and endings, so Bradhurst finally threw down his brush with a sigh, and stretched his arms luxuriously above his head.

"So the Gaikwar of Kargetan agreed to show me through his treasure chambers," he said. "I'll tell you about that some other time. To be continued in our next. You'll pardon me this comfortable stretch, I know."

He threw himself down upon the sward at her feet, his cap shielding his eyes, and yawned.

The girl breathed a disappointed sigh.

"Is the picture finished?"

"Rather not! Only just begun, as a matter of fact."

"Then why did you *stop*?" She regarded him, gravely reproachful.

"Tired—and starved," he explained. "Hadn't any breakfast."

"I think I'm a little hungry myself," agreed the girl, reflectively. "Did you bring any luncheon?"

"I jolly well did. Look!" He sat up suddenly, reached for his kit and produced a thick mysterious looking bundle swathed in crisply laundered linen. He opened it, the girl peering eagerly over his shoulder, and spread the contents out upon the moss and fern between them. There were sandwiches, with three or four kinds of filling, several portions of cold roast-fowl with frilled paper-holders so that one need not soil his fingers, hard-boiled eggs cut star-shaped, olives, and a heat-retaining bottle of chocolate.

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“Do you mean to tell me that you eat such a quantity of things all by yourself?” she asked, wide-eyed.

“Look how big I am. You can’t run a big engine with a little fuel.”

She considered the point, her eyes running thoughtfully over him.

“You *are* big,” she admitted. “Yes—I suppose your argument is well taken, but perhaps—just this once—there will be enough for me, too. Michael always leaves some lunch in a hollow tree for me in the other woods but I’m too comfortable here to go for it.”

“To be *sure* this is for you, too,” cried Bradhurst. “I had the thing put up in fancy style especially for your pleasure. A bit of meat between slices of bread is good enough for me, ordinarily, I assure you. To-day, I am honored.” He poured the chocolate into a little silver drinking-mug and held it out to her. As she reached for it, their fingers touched, and the leather-covered book slid from her lap. It was

Omar Khayyam. Bradhurst waved the flask of chocolate merrily.

“‘A book of Verses underneath the Bough,’” he quoted, and then continued, paraphrasing, “some sandwiches, hot chocolate and—Thou beside me posing in the wilderness . . . which reminds me,” he broke off abruptly. “Do you happen to possess a name?”

She smiled as her white teeth bit into a lettuce sandwich, and nodded, her bright eyes fixed on his, her dimples peeping. The sun, creeping down between the leafy branches above her, fell upon her shining head until its outlines were lost in golden mist.

“I am called Kara,” she said.

“That isn’t at all American, is it?”

“No—my father was Italian.”

“That accounts for your splendor of coloring,” said Bradhurst.

“Do you care for my coloring?” asked the girl, her eyes widening, her slender brows arched in surprise.

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"It's—simply ripping. Wonderful, you know," said Bradhurst flushing. She made him wretchedly uncomfortable when she solicited impersonal opinions about herself, but she didn't know it. She was so intently absorbed by the novelty of his point of view that she didn't notice his flush.

"You're not serious? You don't really admire such dusky skin and such hair!"

"Your skin isn't dusky—it's quite fair—with just a warm golden glow over it—like ivory—and your hair is perfect. Candidly, you are about the most beautiful girl I have ever seen." His voice was slightly hoarse and he looked *most* ill-at-ease and embarrassed, but he made the announcement firmly. He realized that it wasn't quite the thing to be talking like that to the girl—especially to a girl who had never seen another man—but he simply *couldn't* let her go on believing herself unattractive.

"But—all the beautiful women of history were fair," said Kara seriously, "or else very wonderfully dark. I never found one

who had this sort of hair, Helen of Troy was blond—and Venus—and Psyche—and—Marie Antoinette—and Cleopatra was very dark—and so was Zenobia.”

“Nonsense,” he cried decidedly. “Not one of them would have been able to survive comparison with you.”

“And dolls are usually blond,” she added impressively. “They wouldn’t make dolls blond unless people preferred that sort of type.”

“Do I look to you to be a man of honor?” asked Bradhurst, rising upon his elbow and staring up at her ferociously.

“Ye-es.”

“You think that I am sincere—that I mean what I say?”

“Ye-es.”

“Then believe me when I assure you, you are quite perfect. As an artist, I am competent to judge.”

He leaned back, then, with a sigh of satisfaction, and she sat meditating, her chin in her hand, her dreaming eyes fixed upon him.

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"I never used to like dolls" she said slowly, "because they made me feel so hideously ugly."

He didn't answer; she let the pause continue for an instant or two.

"I'm glad I'm pleasant to look at," she said then, judicially. "It makes people so much happier to be near one." Then in a flash her seriousness vanished, her eyes brightened, her dimples deepened, and she burst into a peal of laughter. He watched her contentedly, smiling in sympathy.

"I was thinking of the time I've wasted," she explained, clasping her hands about her knees. "When I was a youngster, I decided that one must be very handsome or very nice for people to like one. All the books seemed to agree on that point. Either the heroes were very handsome and brave or they were so good that everyone loved them; and it was the same with heroines, although they were mostly beautiful, so—I decided I must be nice. I decided for myself that I would never be beautiful.

You can't imagine the energy I've expended trying to make myself a paragon of virtues."

She made a wry face and he roared with laughter.

"And now you discover that you *are* beautiful," he said, "so it is no longer necessary to be nice."

"Perhaps it is just as well," she sighed. "Other people may prefer blond or dark haired women—even if *you* don't—and my niceness will help me with *them*."

She smiled at his grimace, and shielding her eyes, looked at the sun.

"Haven't you rested long enough?" she asked. "I'm anxious for the rest of the story."

"I'd rather lie here and have you talk to me," he said.

"That wasn't in the bargain. I'm not going to say another word." She closed her lips, clasped her hands, and waited. He watched her. The silence grew oppressive. She unclasped her hands, leaned forward

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and began to bombard him with bits of moss and twigs. He arose, yawning and scowling, his blue eyes complaining.

"Very well," he said. "Back to work." He thumbed the palette, selected a brush and stood back regarding the picture critically. She watched his face, a slight frown in her eyes.


"Is it good? Are you satisfied with it?"

"I think so," he nodded uncertainly. "It's pretty soon to judge, though."

She assumed the proper position, carefully placing every fold of her crisp gingham gown exactly as it had been before. He marvelled at her memory for details. Then she nodded to him.

"We'll add this to the bargain," she said. "After you've told me all about yourself, I'll tell you more about me."

"Done!" cried Bradhurst eagerly. His eye rested upon her tightly clasped hands and stiffly held head. "Where was I in the story?" he asked.



"The Gaikwar of Kargetan had just agreed to show you through his treasure chambers. You had gone out to India from school to surprise your father."

"Oh, yes," said Bradhurst nodding. "I remember. There were eight rooms—the biggest, most wonderful rooms you can imagine—filled with precious stones, and cloths of silver and gold, and jewelled ornaments. It was like things you read about in the Arabian Nights. The Gaikwar—" and so the story went on, and Bradhurst painted, and the girl sat listening like one under a spell. It was Jappy who eventually broke up the second sitting, by coming and barking into Kara's face. She looked up to find the afternoon gone and Marie Antoinette and Mary of Scots growing impatient. Bradhurst threw aside his tools and helped her up in utter confusion; apologizing for his forgetfulness.

"I'm a brute," he said, "to keep you still so long. You must be done up."

"I suppose I will be tired after a while,"

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she said, "but I'm still so deep in the story I can't realize. Do you want me again tomorrow?"

"Rather."

"Isn't the picture nearly done?"

"I shall need two or three more sittings, I think, to complete it as I should like it. Will you come?"

"Yes. At the same time. Don't forget where we left off the story."

"No."

"Come Jappy!" she called. "*Allons! Mes amies!*" The little procession formed. She paused and looked back at him.

"I feel as if I've known you for years and years," she said. "Do you feel that way, too?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe in reincarnation? It's such a splendid explanation of this sort of thing. Maybe I've known you for centuries."

"Does the idea please you?" asked Bradhurst.

“Yes. It makes convention seem so very small. . . . *Au revoir!* . . . I detest the significance of ‘good-by.’ ”

“*Au revoir,*” said Bradhurst.

She waved her hand and marshalled her forces through the brush.

Striding back toward his bungalow, his painting kit over his shoulder, Bradhurst summoned himself to counsel. “It’s absurd, you know,” he told himself mentally, “to think that this girl means anything to you. You’ve seen her exactly twice in surroundings that serve to set off her really remarkable charms to the best possible advantage. But to think that you are falling in *love* with her! You always were an imaginative ass! How would she fill the rôle of Lady Bradhurst, I should like to know? How would she appear in the midst of your own set in London—beside the Duchess of Dunderry and your mother, the present Lady Bradhurst? Think of it!” Oddly enough, the idea did not frighten him.

He realized that she was equal to the transformation.

"Well," the worldly wise Lord Bradhurst told the other Lord Bradhurst then, "even if she *is* equal to it! Do you fancy you are *really* in love with her? Don't you understand, you bally ass, that it's the romance of the thing—the spirit of the mountains and woods—the isolation—the loneliness? Think!"

But he had no opportunity to continue the discussion, for at that instant his eye happened to fall upon a wooden sign-post at the side of the road just ahead, the finger pointing toward Lord Bradhurst, the directions reading:

THE ROAD TO EDEN.

He glanced back. The big tree under which she had been sitting, was still visible and the sign-board seemed clearly to be indicating that. Lord Bradhurst nodded gravely, his blue eyes alight with wonder.

“I believe that’s right,” he said slowly to himself, and then again, “I believe—it—is!” He was standing motionless in the roadway, now, smiling slightly, and he was *not* thinking of the little village a few miles up the road.

CHAPTER IV
SILENT MICHAEL

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SILENT MICHAEL

Lord Bradhurst dined that night with such a preoccupied air that Wilkins felt bewildered and hurt. He had considered the dinner an achievement (inasmuch as he was a *valet de chambre* and woefully ignorant of the art of cuisine) and the least that he had expected of his master was a kindly word of encouragement or commendation, but Bradhurst devoured the precious meal as carelessly as he might have done if he had been dining in his own rooms in London, without wondering from where the delicacies had come. Wilkins felt aggrieved and realized that his lot was indeed a sore one. After spending eight years in the service of his master, he awoke suddenly to discover that he was now serving someone quite dif-

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ferent from what Lord Bradhurst had been a few short weeks before. Where he had rarely risen in the mornings before ten, he was now up and ready for his tub at seven. His appetite had increased alarmingly. He had developed a fastidiousness in dress that was the *bete noir* of Wilkins' existence, for the wilderness contained no haberdasheries where reinforcements could be obtained, and the one box his lordship had brought from London held very little indeed; and finally, he developed an absent-mindedness that caused the good Wilkins many moments of anxiety. It was certainly hard upon a valet (who was not a "nipper") to have to learn an entirely new set of eccentricities after serving a master faithfully for eight long years.

So, when he had set the living-room to rights again, and was free to seek his own room, Wilkins departed with more formality than usual in the tone of his "good-night, my lord!" but Bradhurst did not even notice the unusual form of address. He sat before

the big glass windows facing "Balleyhoo" with his pipe between his lips, his bowl of "Three Castles" between his knees, his eyes wandering from the lights of the big dwelling to the blue-white smoke rings drifting upward. He couldn't have been day-dreaming, because he wasn't much given to that sort of thing, but I think his mind was peacefully considering several possibilities that might become certainties—when the big front door of the bungalow opened quietly and the huge figure of a man stood framed in the aperture. Bradhurst turned in surprise, no less at the man's unusual entrance than at his appearance. He must have been six foot tall or more, with large hands and feet, skin browned by the sun and wind, and gray eyes that were serene and mild as an inland lake, but his hair and beard and long moustache were white and very fierce-looking. He was clothed in the shabby garments of a hunter and carried a gun over his shoulder and a game-bag slung upon his back. Bradhurst stood up. The

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visitor entered, closed the door carefully behind him, seated himself upon a wide bench and drawing out his pipe, filled and lighted it deliberately. His whole demeanor was that of a man who is expected and who is quite at home in his surroundings. Bradhurst stared, his fancies dissipated by the strangeness of the occurrence; and finally, when he had gotten his pipe to drawing smoothly and had unslung his bag and set down his gun and removed his pipe, the visitor spoke.

"Like it, harabouts?" he asked conversationally. Bradhurst resumed his seat, with a grin, and lighted his pipe.

"Ripping country," he said.

He came to the conclusion that it was a local custom to call upon strangers and that the giant was a native of Eden, so he accepted the situation with as much *sang froid* as his guest displayed.

"Painter, bein't yuh?" puffed the woodsman, after another pause.

"Yes," said Bradhurst. The pause

lengthened between them and both men puffed away methodically at their pipes.

"Furriner?" suggested the hunter.

"Yes. I'm from London."

"So," said the other with a keen, calculating look. "Thought yuh might've come from Italy. Most furriners does."

"No," said Bradhurst, as the mountaineer apparently waited for some reply. There came another long pause; Bradhurst's interest in the curious old fellow increased. Puff—Puff—Puff went the pipes.

"Ever ben in Italy?" asked the woodsman.

"Yes. Beautiful country," said Bradhurst, between puffs.

The woodsman nodded. "Damned sneaky—Italians," said he, "like snakes. I wuz there onst."

Puff—Puff—Puff—A silence. Puff—Puff—Puff.

"Calculate to stay a spell?" asked the visitor.

"Can't say," Bradhurst answered.

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The huntsman removed his pipe and inspected it critically.

"Better woods up Hell's Kitchen way," he said. "More color. Like t' try it?"

"Why—thanks," said Bradhurst. "I think I'll stay on here for awhile yet, anyway. I might take a look at the other place later."

"Best time o' year, now," said the mountaineer, resuming his pipe.

Another pause—a long one. Puff—Puff—*Puff* went the pipes regularly.

"Married?" asked the visitor, then.

"No," said Bradhurst.

"Calculate t' be?" asked the other.

"If I can find the right girl."

"Kinda lookin' round?" suggested the huntsman.

"Well—I suppose so," assented Bradhurst. The giant nodded solemnly.

"I'm married," he said. "Woman dead eighteen years. Long time."

Then there came the longest pause in the whole conversation. The white-haired

woodsman seemed sunk in reverie, for his pipe went out and he seemed not to notice; Bradhurst watched him in wonder, and thought what a corking study he would make. The silence lasted fully twenty minutes. Then the giant looked up suddenly, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, placed it in his pocket, slung on his game-bag, took up his gun and looked at Bradhurst.

"My name's Michael," he said. "Silent Michael, they call me."

"My name's Bradhurst," said his lordship.

Michael advanced to the door; Bradhurst accompanied him. Some twenty rods away in the moonlight, a small white moth was fluttering. Michael stopped, raised his gun like a flash and fired. Where the moth had been, a scrap of soiled, singed white lay upon the earth. Michael tossed away the empty cartridge. Bradhurst nodded, reached for the gun, took it from the old man's hand and examined it.

"Best shot harabouts," said Michael.

Bradhurst raised his head, swung the rifle into position and without pausing to aim, fired. There came a fluttering of leaves from the big tree at the turn in the path, and a pigeon tumbled downward, her white breast-feathers soiled and bloodstained.

"Second-best shot," smiled Bradhurst, returning the gun. Michael looked from the Englishman to the sacrificed bird.

"One of my pigeons," he said. Then he shook his head, and without another word he started off. When he reached the big tree, he picked up the bird, examined it critically, and dropped it into his bag. Then he rounded the curve in the path and disappeared. Bradhurst went in and closed the door, wondering at the old fellow's peculiar behavior.

The next morning when he reached the bit of sun-flecked road that they used for a studio, Kara was not there. He waited about impatiently, alternating between anxiety and anger, but it was a good half hour before he finally saw the drawbridge descend

and the little procession cross it. He went half way to meet her, his eyes bitterly reproachful.

"You're late," he said by way of greeting.

"Michael delayed me," she said, tearing off her sunbonnet and swinging it by the strings. The sun poured down upon her bare head, turning her hair to burnished copper; her eyes glowed, her lips curved with mischief and witchery.

"Michael?" repeated Bradhurst, staring.

She nodded, moving on beside him through the woods, Mary of Scots and Marie Antoinette following, and Jappy bringing up the rear.

"The Chief Hunter and Woodsman at 'Balleyhoo.' He has constituted himself my guardian, and he advised me not to see any more of you."

"What?" cried Bradhurst. "Why—he came to see me last night, the old rogue."

"I know," she said, "he told me. He distrusts you. He insinuates that these

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mountains are a very good place in which one might hide, and he insists that you know too much about guns to be an artist. He says an artist should know about *paints*, and a *woodsman* about *guns*."


"Did he mean to reflect upon my ability as a painter?" gasped Bradhurst.

"Perhaps not," she laughed. "He usually says exactly what he means and as briefly as he can."

"I observed that," said Bradhurst smiling.

"What gave him the impression you can shoot?" she asked, looking up at him thoughtfully.

Bradhurst flushed. "That was an unpardonable bit of theatrical business. He'd been sitting there half an hour or more asking me questions, which I answered to the best of my ability. I thought he was a native attempting to be friendly. If I'd known he was intending to sit in judgment upon me, I should have acted more like his probable ideal of an artist."



She smiled as he paused and caught off his cap.

"Well—when he rose to leave, I accompanied him to the door—and he displayed his marksmanship for my benefit. I took the gun and made a fearfully sensational shot quite by chance."

"*Was* it by chance? Word of honor?" she asked.

"Well—no," said Bradhurst. "I—I *am* a rather crack shot, you know. That's one of the few things I can do. It's a useless trick."

She regarded him thoughtfully.

"There might be something in his suspicions, after all," she said slowly. "This would be a splendid place to hide—and—men *don't* drop from the skies into a place they've never seen before—just to paint scenery, you know—not as a general thing."

"Don't they?" he asked politely, in spite of his heightened color.

"I shouldn't think so, I mean, of course. I don't *know*."

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"Then you think I've been deceiving you," he said.

She met his eyes frankly. "No, I don't," she said. "I've been teasing you. I believe in you absolutely, or I should not be here."

He smiled wryly, his face very boyish.

"But I *have* been deceiving you—in a way," he said.

She smiled. "In a pardonable way, then. Just for a joke, perhaps?"

"Not exactly. I *am* in hiding here. You remember I made you promise not to repeat anything I told you—about myself or my life. I did that because it is quite possible there is a search being made for me."

"Did you do anything wrong?" she asked gravely.

"No—nothing that you or I would consider wrong."

She shrugged. "What does it matter, then? You are capable of judging. I trust you."

The blood surged into his face, and his heart beat faster.

"What is it?" she asked curiously, turning to him. "Have I said something I shouldn't have said?"

"No. Why?"

"You looked startled. I've tried to learn what a girl may properly say and what she may not, but it's rather a difficult lesson. I instinctively tell the truth about things."

"You'd have to overcome that tendency if you ever got out into the world," said Bradhurst laughing.

"Why? Don't people tell the truth out there?" Her eyes were very wide now, and wondering.

"When they can—without making anyone uncomfortable. When the truth is unpleasant—they—well—rely upon their tact and imagination."

"Oh! That's just kindness," said Kara, nodding.


They had come by this time into the "studio" and she seated herself in the

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proper position against the big tree. As he fumbled with the brushes and color-tubes, she watched him reflectively. Her brown eyes were misty with dreams, her lips slightly parted.

"Are there any villains, really?" she asked. "The wicked, malicious sort one finds sometimes in books?"

"I've never met any," he answered thoughtfully. "There are some men and women who are compelled, by one circumstance or another, to play the rôle of villain; but usually they are really splendid folk in another way. For instance—a man may rob a bank. We'd say, if we noticed the headlines in the papers, that he ought to be caught and locked up, but it is quite possible that he needed the money desperately and was unable to get it in any other way. I don't mean to condone theft, you understand, but I mean that if we could see the *reasons* for things, usually, or the causes that led up to them, we'd find the villains much like other people." He held the



brush aloft in mid-air, now, the palette on his thumb.

"I suppose life is like the theater," she said. "Sometimes really good men have to play wicked parts, don't they? The stage-manager makes them do it. I suppose some force of circumstances is responsible in this big theater, too. Everyone would be good from choice, I imagine."

He nodded, working away intently upon the eyes, despairing of ever being able to copy the velvety-depths, the lustre, the thoughtfulness of the originals.

"I know a villain—a real villain," she said slowly. "My father's one. I wonder what makes him be one."

"Your father?" cried Bradhurst, staring over the top of the canvas, horrified. "I thought he was dead."

"No," she said. She sighed softly and her eyes grew shadowy.

"What makes you say he's a villain?" asked Bradhurst curiously.

"Because he *is*. Oh—he isn't a mur-

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derer, you know, or a thief—or anything like that—but if we were all in a story, he'd be the villain of it. That's what I meant. Shouldn't you dislike being the villain?"

"One might repent in the last chapter," he suggested.

"But suppose you couldn't know when the last chapter was coming?"

"Then you'd have to be the hero. I fancy I'd prefer being the hero, anyway."

She studied him thoughtfully.

"You look eligible," she said. "That first day, you didn't—with a beard, and your clothes all careless. But you are very good-looking now."

He flushed and her eyes, quick to observe the slightest thing about him, detected it.

"Why shouldn't I have said *that*?" she asked.

"Well," he answered, laughing grimly, "it's a bit unusual, that's all. Girls as a rule don't."

"Why?"

"I'm sure I've not the least idea." He was painting madly.

"Why shouldn't they, though? Don't you like to be good-looking?"

"Well—ye-es, of course. *Anyone* would like it."

"Didn't you think you were?"

"I never think about it," said Bradhurst blushing.

She shook her head hopelessly, as though the understanding of it were quite beyond her.

"You are like a hero in a good many ways," she said.

"Nonsense," said Bradhurst. "There are millions of chaps just like me. I'm distressingly commonplace, really."

"Are the others as nice as you—and as interesting?" she asked, looking up at him with a smile.

"I think I'll tell you 'no,' " he reflected aloud, the end of his brush between his teeth, his eyes fixed upon her whimsically.

"Why?"

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He laughed frankly. "So that you'll like me better, of course."

"But I do like you," she said. "I shouldn't be here if I didn't."

"But you staid the first time. You didn't like me then. I had a beard, and my clothes were careless, you remember."

"Oh, I staid out of curiosity, partly, because a man was a novelty to me and partly to see if I was *going* to like you. I usually know after I've had one good look. I like and dislike people instinctively, don't you?"

~~"I don't know.~~ I've never thought about it. Ye-es, I believe I do."

"Did you like me at once?" she asked.

"*Certainly.*"

She smiled contentedly, her dark eyes shining, her red lips parting to display her even white teeth; the dimples ventured forth.

"I liked you," she said, "as soon as I heard your voice. You've a wonderfully pleasant, honest-sounding voice. I should

think it would make people trust you and believe you instantly. I wonder Michael didn't." He plied the palette-knife painstakingly and tried not to look pleased. She sighed very softly.

"Were you ever in Italy?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Could you tell me about it without interrupting your story much? I was born there, you know."

"I jolly well *can*. What would you like to hear?" He looked up at her absent-mindedly, studying the lines of her throat and ear, but the painter-look vanished as his eyes focussed upon her and took in her wonderful beauty.

"Everything—about the climate—and the streets—and the people—and the customs. Anything you can recall."

"Right!" he said, selecting a finer brush and dipping it into a dark red pigment. "I was there only once—on a walking tour with a pal of mine—but we saw a good deal that most English visitors don't see. Painter-

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chaps have a way of getting underneath, you know, and in Italy they are rather welcome. I remember—”

And he was off on a string of reminiscences that kept her entranced for an hour or more. Then they had luncheon under the big shade tree in that little sun-flecked open-place that lies on the road to Eden. It doesn't matter much about what they talked. Enough that they *did* talk, and that they were there together, and that the sun peeped down upon them through the thick leaves and that the breeze blew in on them, sweet with the scent of the woods. No wonder they thrilled with divine madness. No wonder their hearts sang in tune and their eyes were bright with gladness or shadowy with dreams. There was a tiny golden arrow piercing the heart of each, and a tiny golden chain ran from arrow to arrow, but both chain and arrows were constructed of invisible fairy-gold, and so they never knew, nor did they suspect that Cupid had cunningly devised a most curiously colored bird to

lure old Michael miles away where he could not eavesdrop. He knew how short their little hour was to be—this pink chap—and he wanted them to live it in peace.

CHAPTER V
CASTLES IN SPAIN



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The picture progressed with remarkable rapidity, all things considered. It must be admitted at once, that as their acquaintance progressed—as it approached the Borderland and crossed into the Enchanted Land—the working periods grew shorter and the periods for rest and recreation expanded. But Bradhurst assured himself and his model that they were not wasting time.

“In order to paint you well,” he said, “I must know you well.” And this he set about doing most assiduously, but though she talked freely enough of what she read—what she thought—what she dreamed—she told him nothing of her personal history or of her life inside the castle. His story was not yet done, and she had insisted upon

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waiting to tell hers until his was told. If the truth were known, Bradhurst was rather delaying things. He dreaded coming to the duel and its consequences. He had heard nothing from Billy, though nearly four weeks of his exile had passed, so he concluded that De Larres had died, and that it would be unwise for his murderer to return to London just yet. His murderer! Young Bradhurst scowled at the horrid sound of it.

He knew that if it were all to happen again—if they could all relive that night and De Larres—or anyone else—should repeat what he had said about Eleanore—good old Eleanore—sweet, brave, old girl—he would act again precisely as he *had* acted, so he really regretted nothing that he had done, but—how could he tell this unspoiled, innocent girl that he had killed a man—even though it *was* for defaming a woman. It was a dreadful thing for a chap to have done.

So she had yet to hear that part of his



history, and they were lounging among the grass and fern upon the sixth day, reading from Omar Khayyam, when there came a sudden crackling of the brush behind Bradhurst, and a woman appeared in the roadway below them. I have written "woman" but really she was little more than a girl, for she was still young though a certain look of coldness and reserve and hauteur about the eyes and mouth lent her a look of experience that passed for maturity. She had slate blue eyes, with shadows about them, and bright hair dressed low on her neck, and she was in fresh white linen severely made, though her feminine tastes betrayed themselves in the lace frills at her throat, in the sweeping white plume upon her black hat, in her corsage of violets and her fluffy sunshade. As she paused, surveying the pretty tableau with swiftly narrowing eyes, Kara raised her head and they regarded each other for a moment.

Something electric in the atmosphere aroused Bradhurst. He turned, leaped to

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his feet, his color deepening, and advanced with outstretched hands.

"*Eleanore!*" he cried, in utter amazement. Her Grace of Dunderry raised her pale eyebrows slightly and smiled. There was a flicker of amusement deep down in her eyes, and the corners of her mouth drooped.

"Do I intrude?" she asked whimsically. "I stopped at the bungalow and Wilkins told me you were—eh—painting up the road a bit, so I thought I'd surprise you. I didn't suppose you'd found a model in this wilderness."

She included Kara in her smile, now, and the girl flushed. She was watching the Duchess steadily, from under frowning brows; Bradhurst was frankly ill at ease in the embarrassing situation.

"You did surprise me," he said grimly. "I'd no idea you were in this part of the country—didn't know you'd left London at all, in fact. I haven't had a line since I left."

"Rather not," said Her Grace mildly, "since you neglected to tell us under what name you intended travelling. We didn't dare risk your own, at first—and later, we hesitated lest we make things uncomfortable for you here." She glanced about her listlessly. "What a paradise you did find! I understand it's a mere mile or two from Eden." Her glance returned to Kara again at this, and Bradhurst flushed.

"It *is* Eden," he said, "not a mere mile or two away."

"Really?" cried the Duchess politely. "I'm so glad." She sank down languidly upon the painting stool and smiled. "Don't mind if I rest a minute, do you? The walk was a bit more than I counted on."

"I should have offered you the stool sooner," cried Bradhurst contritely. "I'm afraid I went off my head a bit with surprise at seeing you. Will you have some water?"

"Thanks, no." Her eyes had fallen upon the picture now, and she was staring at it,

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with the wondering, incredulous look of a child.

"This—*isn't yours, Penn?*" she whispered, softly.

"Yes."

Her Grace looked up into his face, then her eyes fell upon Kara and returned to the canvas almost involuntarily.

"But—it's *great*," she cried in a low voice, "*great!*" And then for a long, long time, she sat there in silence, her eyes fixed upon the picture. Kara stood motionless, frowning; Bradhurst crossed to stand behind Her Grace.

"What do you call it?" Her Grace's voice was slightly uncertain.

"'Castles in Spain.'"

"'Castles in Spain,' " she repeated slowly. "Yes—of course. I see. Penn, Penn, you've done it this time."

He flushed at the look in her eyes as they met his, and Kara caught her breath sharply. The color had utterly deserted her face, and her red lips and great dark eyes were

thrown into high relief. Her hands were clenched violently about the strings of the blue sunbonnet.

"You'll not want me again to-day, perhaps?" she asked in a low voice, her eyes compelling Bradhurst's.

His lordship's color deepened and he glanced from the girl to Her Grace of Dunderry.

"Why—yes," he said, "I had intended—" Her Grace rose instantly.

"Anyway—I'm tired posing," said the girl. "To-morrow—" She looked directly into Bradhurst's eyes, and without another word, turned and disappeared. Marie Antoinette and the Queen of Scots stared mildly after her, apparently wondering at her curious behavior, but faithful Jappy followed at her heels, heedlessly deserting his royal charges. The Duchess faced Bradhurst.

"Who is she?" she asked.

"A milkmaid—up at the castle, there."

"A milkmaid?"

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"A superior sort of milkmaid."

"So I gather," smiled Eleanore. "A milkmaid who is interested in Omar. I suppose you have been seeing her frequently, Penn?"

"Every day."

"Ah! *That* is why you have been contented in your exile. I might have guessed."

"It would have been unendurable without her," he confessed frankly.

"I judged so from the picture," said Her Grace, seating herself again and poking little holes in the moss with the point of her parasol. "I suppose," she added lightly, "you fancy yourself in love with her?"

Bradhurst met her eyes gravely. "It isn't fancy," he said.

Her Grace looked up, laughing a little, and shaking her head.

"Have you been making love to her?" she asked, and then before he could answer, she went on grimly, "but of course you have. Men of your type make love to women in-

stinctively—with every look and smile—quite unconsciously—and women love you as naturally.”

“Rot!” cried Bradhurst.

“I tell you, she is in love with you. What are you going to do about it?”

“She isn’t. And if she *were*—” he smiled suddenly, “I should consider myself the luckiest beggar alive. You’ve no idea what she’s like, Nell!”

“I can pretty well guess what you think she’s like,” smiled the Duchess cynically. “So—the next Lady Bradhurst is a milkmaid?”

“There’s nothing particularly disgraceful in being a milkmaid,” said Bradhurst.

“No. It’s infinitely better than a Gayety girl, and the peerage is over-run with them. And she *is* exquisite! I don’t believe I’ve ever seen such hair and coloring.”

Bradhurst nodded gravely. “But it isn’t that alone,” he said. “It’s her sweet simplicity that captivates me—her enthusiasm—her idealism. . . .”

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"In fact," sighed the Duchess, "you adore her for differing from every woman in your set. We are an unemotional, unimaginative, frivolous, brainless lot, I'm afraid."

"It's not that," said Bradhurst slowly, "but the girls one knows are interested in such superficial things and besides—one loves *because* one loves—not for any sensible reason. I think that's about it, Nell."

She nodded. "I'm afraid that is it, Penn." She rose slowly. "Will you walk down the road a bit? Perrucini promised to pick me up in half an hour at your bungalow."

"Who?" asked Bradhurst, looking up.

"Prince Perrucini. We're stopping with him. He's a place somewhere about here, for some reason or other." She flushed crimson under his eyes.

"I should think," he said, "that your Duke would draw the line somewhere. The fellow's been thrown out of half the clubs in Europe and his reputation—"

"My Duke," said Eleanore calmly, "goes any place where he can find amusement—and Perrucini is always amusing. I—I have become more tolerant in the last year or two."

"It seems so," said Bradhurst gravely. "I'm sorry."

"It does no good to oppose him. It results only in unhappiness for me. Besides—it doesn't matter much whether I countenance his friends or not. So long as I am his wife, the world judges us together." She twirled her sunshade restlessly, as he began to pack up his kit. "I've never accepted Perrucini before—but—I had to get away from London. The whole town was gossiping—and I—Ormond was coming here, so I thought if I came with him, it might stop the chatter."

He had straightened suddenly and was staring at her.

"Do you mean that I am responsible for this, that it was my duel with De Larres started the gossip?"

"Yes."

"Then—they're linking your name with mine?"

"Yes," she repeated unwillingly. "Don't feel badly, Penn. I understand. You wanted to champion me—you wanted to help."

His hands were clenched convulsively, his eyes were afire.

"And I added to your burdens," he said. "I acted like a child—like a reckless, hot-headed youngster."

"Never mind," she said softly. "Before I return, they'll have found something else to interest them. It doesn't much matter, Penn, really. I've nothing to lose. I threw all that was worth while away—when I married."

"Eleanore!"

"Let me speak frankly this once, Penn," she said. "I have always been 'brave' and 'loyal' before. I've always pretended to love him—and to overlook the fact that he's a drunken beast—the disgrace of the peer-

age." Her eyes were very bright, now, too, and aglow with a new light; all the cynicism and coldness had faded from her face, leaving her years younger.

"I hate him," she said, "but I endure him because he bears an old name and the King doesn't want me to divorce him—and because he married me when nobody else wanted to because I was a penniless aristocrat—the saddest thing anyone can be."

She wiped her eyes and smiled suddenly.

"And now," she finished wryly, "you are hating me for making a scene, and no wonder. It's the first scene I've ever made in my life."

"Rot!" cried Bradhurst, in a troubled voice.

"I think it was your picture started me," said Her Grace of Dunderry. "It reminded me of *my* poor impossible 'Castles in Spain,' and—I try not to be reminded of them. It makes things easier."

He picked up his painting things moodily and started off beside her, down the road.

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Her Grace observed that they were leaving Eden behind them, but Bradhurst was too absorbed to notice the sign-board staunchly pointing out the way.

"I wish," he said grimly, "that I had *made* you listen to me when you told me you were going to marry him. But you were so determined."

"You did the best you knew how," said Eleanore. "You gave me the best advice you could and I'm going to give you the best I can, now. Marry your milkmaid, Penn—if you love her. Marry her quickly—before anyone can lead you into the quicksands of false arguments. Nothing is worth while on God's green earth but love. Never marry for any other reason. The one comfort in my ghastly mistake is that I provide such a convincing example. A man of your class could find happiness with any woman in the times of prosperity, but if ever the time should come when you have to face things together—*hard* things—then your reason for marrying *counts!*"



"Yes," he said gravely, "I think you are right, Nell."

"And now," said the Duchess smiling faintly, "we are going to talk about sunshine and green fields and little babbling-brooks and the songs of birds and good things to eat. Can't you say something funny, Penn?"

"I'm trying to think of something," he said, scowling.

The Duchess laughed. "Think quickly, then. That's Perrucini waiting below there, and he has sharp eyes. Is my nose red? Do I look at all unusual?"

"No," said Bradhurst, scrutinizing her.

"You wouldn't know if I did," she scoffed. "You have eyes only for milk-maids." She shut her eyes suddenly, and smiled. "What color are my eyes?"

"Blue," he said at a venture, laughing guiltily.

"Wrong. They're more gray than blue and you've known me all my life. For shame, sir!"

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Then they approached the last descent above the bungalow, and the girl who had been beside him an instant before—the girl he had chummed with as a youngster—vanished utterly, and was replaced by the cold, indifferent, rather reserved woman whom the world knew as Her Grace, the Duchess of Dunderry; and it was the Duchess who introduced him carelessly to Perucini—the Duchess who gave him her hand as she mounted into the motor beside the Prince—the Duchess who disappeared down the long mountain road that did *not* lead toward Eden.

Bradhurst went back to the “studio” hoping to find Kara there, but the big tree was deserted, and though he looked about through the woods between there and the drawbridge, he found no trace of her. So he went gloomily back to the bungalow, to swear at Wilkins and read and smoke and dream, and wish for the hours to pass to make room for another day.

CHAPTER VI
THE SERPENT ENTERS

CHAPTER VI

THE SERPENT ENTERS

She did not keep the tryst on the following day. He waited for her from the usual time until noon, but there came no sign from her. Then he began to worry, and he searched the woods but not one of the little procession was visible anywhere. If the drawbridge had dropped into place, he hadn't noticed, and he was much too far away to *hear*. He began to imagine that she was ill, and the thought of it—and the sight of the big tree that usually shaded her—sent him tearing off towards the castle in hot haste. Arrived at the moat, however, he was unable to attract the attention of anyone by shouting, and the drawbridge was raised, so it was impossible to cross. Even swimming the moat was not to be thought of, for

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the walls were quite smooth and he could have found a foothold nowhere on the other side. If the place had been in a state of defense it could not have been more impenetrable. So he stood thinking how he could get to her.

He lingered about near the drawbridge for an hour or more, hoping that someone might pass, but nobody did and eventually he gave it up, and started off into the woods in search of Michael. He knew that the old huntsman distrusted him, but it was barely possible that he knew something that might relieve a fellow's mind. So back into the woods strode Bradhurst, up and down, and in and out, this way and that, until way on in the afternoon he actually did come upon the old man asleep. He looked something like Rip Van Winkle as he lay there, but a stolider Rip, lacking Rip's good-nature and merry grin. Bradhurst seated himself placidly beside the hunter, filled his pipe, and waited. Presently the old man opened his eyes, as though becoming conscious that

someone was near him, and Bradhurst nodded.

"Seen Kara?" he asked, trying to keep the eagerness out of his eyes and voice.

The woodsman sat up, straightened his clothes, filled and lighted his pipe and leaned back comfortably against a tree-stump.

"Often," he said,—Puff—Puff—Puff—
Bradhurst felt like choking him.

"To-day?" he asked, instead, softening his voice politely.

"Nope."

"Do you know—if she's ill?" Bradhurst almost stuck on the last word. Michael scrutinized him thoughtfully.

"Bout 's usual," he admitted.

Then he puffed away fiercely.

"Will you ask her," Bradhurst ventured, "why she didn't come to pose for me to-day? And tell her I can't finish the picture without her. Please. If I knew how to get across the drawbridge, I should carry the message myself, but Mrs. Van der Griffit evidently doesn't countenance visitors."

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"Not furriners," acknowledged Michael grimly. Then he smoked on, evidently forgetful of Bradhurst's presence.

"Will you deliver the message for me?" he persisted. "I shall be greatly obliged—and anything I can do in return—"

"Ain't nothin' yuh can do for me—not now," grumbled the old man. Then he gazed reflectively at his pipe and fell silent. Bradhurst's face flushed, he rose slowly and turned away.

"I'll tell her," cried Michael after him.

Bradhurst turned, gazed gratefully into the old man's twinkling eyes and dashed into the woods. Michael chuckled to himself and went on smoking. Puff—Puff—Puff—

That night, his lordship passed his first sleepless night since he had gone into exile. He tossed about until nearly daybreak wondering *what* could have happened to keep her from the rendezvous. Then he fell asleep and slept until long past the hour that he usually met her. He tubbed and dressed

in wild haste and without waiting for breakfast, started on a run up the mountain toward the "studio." She was not there nor was there any sign of her. The spot was deserted, and young Bradhurst could not endure the sight of it. He left his painting kit as a sort of signal that he would come back, and started slowly toward the castle. He was of two minds—undecided whether he should seek out old Michael again, or whether he should try to invade the stronghold himself. In the end, after a desultory search for the old hunter, he gave it up and travelling to the long approach before the drawbridge of "Balleyhoo," there he posted himself, determined to wait all day if necessary until the bridge was dropped, or until someone about the big dwelling caught sight of him.

About ten o'clock his persistency was rewarded. Suddenly the big stone gates swung wide, the bridge whirled down into place, and there came toward him their royal majesties, Marie Antoinette and Mary

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of Scots, with a slender figure in freshly laundered gingham gown and stiff sunbonnet behind them. His heart leaped with sudden relief and he went to meet them eagerly—only to stand motionless in the road and stare when they reached him. For the girl was not Kara but a blue eyed, flaxen-haired country girl in clothes exactly like those Kara had worn. She answered Bradhurst's stare with a blush and a curtsy and a slow smile.

"Where's Kara?" he asked briefly.

The girl shook her head, smiling slightly, and shrugged.

"I don't know, sir," she said. "I don't know no sich person."

"Are you a milkmaid at 'Balleyhoo'?" he asked.

"Y-as, sir."

"Isn't there a dark-haired one?"

"No, sir. I'm jist the milkmaid. They ain't no one else."

"Isn't there a dark-haired girl in the castle at *all*?" asked Bradhurst.

"No, sir," said the girl. Then she observed the anxious, wistful look in his eyes, and with a guilty glance over her shoulder, she added, "Y-as, sir—they is, sir. She told me I wa'nt to tell yuh nuthin' but—shucks! I got to."

"Is she ill?" asked Bradhurst in a troubled voice.

"No, sir. Jist mad, I reckon."

"*Mad?*" repeated Bradhurst wonderingly. He had imagined everything but that she was staying away of her own volition. He had imagined her ill and unable to come. He had imagined her forcibly restrained by Michael—or even the grim old lady who ruled the castle, but—that she had not wanted to come! It sounded incredible. The milkmaid giggled nervously.

"What makes you think she's angry?" asked Bradhurst curiously.

"She don't seem so pert and lively. She jist sits round quiet-like and stares at the floor—and night afore last, she raged round like a tiger-cat and cried most all night."

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She giggled again, into his astonished face. "I *heered* her," she added impressively.

"What was she *crying* about?" asked Bradhurst, aghast at such a calamity.

"I don't know, sir," said she. "She cum in from the woods mad, day afore yistidday. She lef' the cows out and Michael had t' fetch 'em."

Bradhurst regarded her perplexedly. He could recall no possible manner wherein he could have given offense, but it began to be evident now, that offense had been given, so he sighed and fumbled for his pocket note-book.

"Will you take a note to her for me?" he asked.

The girl opened her eyes and gasped.

"I *dassn't*," she cried. "She told me not t' tell yuh nuthin. I—*dassn't* let on I *told*."

"I'll make it all right with her for you," said Bradhurst, with much more confidence than he felt. The girl looked dubious, but he tore out a sheet of lined paper and hastily scribbled a few lines:—

“Why didn’t you come to pose yesterday and to-day—and why didn’t you answer the message I sent by Michael? I’ve been worried about you. You know I can’t finish the picture without you! When are you coming back? Reply by bearer whom you must pardon for answering my questions. I made her.”

He couldn’t sign it, because she didn’t know his name, but he knew that the text would indicate the writer, so he folded it into a cocked hat and gave it into the milkmaid’s keeping. Either his promise of protection had relieved her mind—or his smile had utterly captivated her; at any rate, she signalled the drawbridge by ringing a small bell hidden in the gatepost, and when it descended, she crossed and disappeared through the gates, leaving Marie Antoinette and the Scottish queen in Bradhurst’s care. She was gone a *very* long time. He strode up and down in the roadway, watching the castle and imagining every sort of answer

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she could possibly make, but when the flaxen-haired milkmaid finally returned, flushed and breathless, with a bit of stiff white paper, the lines on it surprised him.

“I have decided not to come back,
as you will naturally want her (the
blonde woman) to be your model,
now. I shall not punish Peggy.

“KARA.”

He re-read the lines, his eyes lighting, his face suddenly suffused with color as it dawned upon him that she was *jealous*. He was annoyed at himself as soon as he had formulated the thought, but a glance at Peggy convinced him that she had not suspected what was going on in his mind, and he felt slightly relieved. It *must* be jealousy! And that meant that she *was* in love with him, as Eleanore had divined. The thought sent the blood racing through him. It was impossible! It was unbelievable. It was wonderful! He tore out another sheet of note-paper and busied himself with the

composition of a second note. Her letter he placed in his inside pocket, very carefully indeed.

“Please come back with me to the ‘studio’ at once. I have something of the utmost importance to tell you. It is much more interesting than anything I have ever told you before. It will please you more than anything you have ever read. Make haste! . . . The Duchess of Dunderry *couldn’t* pose for ‘Castles in Spain.’ No-body can but you. If you won’t, I shall never finish the picture. . . . I mean this. . . .”

He prided himself upon having written a very tactful note, and delivered it to Peggy with considerable satisfaction. Peggy accepted it reluctantly, explaining that such frequent crossings of the drawbridge was certain to draw wrath upon her head either from David, who had charge of the machinery, or from the “Griffin” herself, but Brad-

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hurst's persuasive powers again prevailed. Peggy carried the note and in good season returned with the answer.

"I seem to be three-fourths curiosity and one-fourth conceit for your letter persuaded me to come—as you knew it would, of course. I will meet you at the 'studio' in a few minutes. Wait there!

"KARA."

He bestowed upon the beaming Peggy his sincerest thanks and a shining gold-piece that he had been carrying as a lucky charm, and then he strode away down the road, leaving her wide-eyed behind him. Back in the "studio" again, he set up the easel and stool, so that everything might be exactly as it had been, and arranged the luncheon that Wilkins had left during his master's absence. And then he settled himself as patiently as he could to wait.

It was almost half an hour before he finally saw the slender blue figure on the castle-road and then—a moment or two more

—and she was facing him across the clearing. She carried her sunbonnet by the strings, her eyes were glowing, her cheeks flushed, her bosom stirring with the violence of her breathing—for she had run all the way through the woods.

“Well?” she asked breathlessly. “What did—you want—to tell me?”

He advanced with a great laugh and catching her in his arms, crushed her close to him and took her lips.

“This,” he said, “and this—and this!” punctuating with kisses. “Do you understand—Dear? Was it worth coming to hear?”

She drew back and regarded him, her pupils distended until her eyes were almost black, but wide and bright, and a little frightened. And she did not speak.

“I love you,” he whispered, his voice very low but vibrant and glad, “and I’ve learned that I can’t get on without you. Do you think you could love me a little, too, Dear?”

She held up her lips with a little whimsical smile.

"I can't *help* loving you," she said. "I know—because I've *tried*."

"What?" he cried in astonishment.

"I've been trying," she said, "since day before yesterday. I've been so wretched," she finished wistfully, her arms about his neck, her cheek against his.

"And I've been simply *wild* with anxiety."

She stroked his light hair with a motherly hand.

"Poor boy," she said. Then with a lightning change of mood, she leaned back in his arms and looked up at him.

"Are you *sure* you love me?" she asked.

"Absolutely certain. I've not had the slightest doubt since the minute I saw you."

"Honor bright?" she asked earnestly.

"Honor bright."

"You might have told me at once, then," she said, "and saved us all that misery."

"I was afraid of frightening you off by

speaking too soon. Besides—I'm afraid I ought not to be speaking even now. It's not quite fair to you since you've never really seen another man—besides Michael, perhaps."

"I have—once—though I didn't speak to him. But—what difference would it make how many I'd see. I couldn't help loving you anyway. *Nobody* could."

"Lots of people *have*," he answered laughing.

"They've only pretended to," she replied positively. "Why—even Michael likes you now."

He waved Michael away with a carelessness almost cruel.

"What concerns me," he said, "is whether it is possible for you to love me without having known other men to compare with me."

"One doesn't compare the eligible men and fall in love with the most desirable," she told him, with a shake of the head. "One loves a person simply because—one loves him—that's all. It wouldn't make

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the slightest difference in the world—if a million other men—all cleverer and handsomer than you should fall in love with me this minute. I'd still love you."

He gasped at her loyalty.

"Of course," she added truthfully, "it couldn't happen, because there *aren't* any handsomer or cleverer."

He laughed.

"I'm beginning to believe that you love me," he said. "Otherwise, you couldn't possibly make such absurd statements."

"Let's sit down and have some lunch," she suggested seriously. "I haven't really eaten since day before yesterday. I quite lost my appetite. Now, I'm famished."

He considered her gravely.

"I missed breakfast to-day myself," he said, "but it hadn't occurred to me until now." She watched him, lying back lazily against her tree as he produced innumerable good things from the white-lined basket and spread them out upon a linen cloth between them. Up in the tree, a little

brown song-bird chanced to catch a glimpse of her eyes, and he promptly sang himself hoarse in an effort to fittingly celebrate the occasion. Little flecks of sunlight danced here and there pointing out her smooth skin and red lips and white throat and shining hair—and once—as the mischievous west wind blew back her skirt a little way—timidly lighted upon her slim foot and slender ankle.

“Do you know,” she observed at length, with a faint frown, “you’d better be very sure that you love me—before you swear it. I’m part Italian—and—I could *kill* any other woman who’d take you away from me. I mean it. There was murder in my heart the other day—when the Duchess came—and you smiled at her!” She bit into an orange with a little flash of even white teeth and began to tear off the golden rind.

He laughed.

“What a little barbarian you are,” he said.

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"I don't see *how* you can love me better. She's so white and gold and stately."

"Men admire her type," he said, "and worship yours."

"She loves *you*," observed Kara, between bites.

"Hardly. I've just gotten her into a fearful mess. I wonder she doesn't cut my acquaintance."

"Why?" asked the girl eagerly.


He told her about the duel, making his own part in it as slight as he could.

"So you see," he finished, "she was really the cause of my finding you."

"And you think she blames you for what you did?" cried Kara wonderingly.

"No—she said she would forgive me. I've always been impulsive you see, and she understands that. She's known me a long time, and—she's always been a good sort."

"She forgives you?" repeated Kara, wide eyed. "I *love* you for it! I love you a million times more than I did before—though I knew you to be capable of just



such honor and bravery and—goodness . . . Don't you see what a *splendid* thing it was, dear?"

He flushed. "I believed it to be the *right* thing, you know, but Eleanore saw it differently."

"Does it matter—that she didn't understand?" asked the girl.

"Nothing matters—if *you* understand," he said. "I've been afraid to come to that part of my story for fear you wouldn't. I don't care what any one thinks—ever—so long as *you* believe in me."

"I *do* believe in you," she said. "I love you with all my heart."

"You're sure?" he asked anxiously. "Life lasts a long time, dear, and—you will meet hundreds of men—out there in the world—who—"

"Hush!" she cried, stopping his mouth with a kiss. "If I were to live all the rest of my life—with just one person in the world—I should choose you. I could give up anyone else. I could never give *you* up."

No other man *could* win me away from you. I *love* you—don't you see? Please—love *me*—only half as much as I love you."

He caught her eagerly in his arms and kissed her lips, her throat, her hair.

"I love you with all my body and soul," he cried in her ear, "with every drop of blood—with every fibre of me. You must believe me."

"I believe you!" she whispered, laughing softly with content.

They did no work that day. The hours sped by as so many seconds bringing the sunset before he had done telling her what they should do (and how much he loved her) and where they should go (and how much he loved her) and the wonderful parts of the world she should see (and how much he loved her) and finally how they would return to England and she should be presented to the Queen. At that, she turned about swiftly and faced him, her dark eyes wide.

"Do you know," she said, "that I haven't

the least idea what your name is—except that the Duchess called you ‘Penn.’ Are you *titled*?”

“Yes. I’m Edgar Penniston, Lord Bradhurst.”

“An English lord!” she cried slowly. “Oh, dear! I might have known.”

“What’s wrong?” asked Bradhurst curiously. “Don’t you like my being a lord?”

“I’m afraid I shall have a difficult time marrying you,” she said, “unless we elope. I’m not permitted to marry a title.”

“Why not?” asked Bradhurst.

“Do you realize that you don’t know my name, either?” she asked, in lieu of answering.

“But I do—Kara.”

“That’s only a part of it.” She surveyed him with a faint and troubled smile, her color deepening. “I’m Kara Eugénie Katherine Hélène Louise, Princess Perrucini.”

“What?” cried Bradhurst, staring. “You’re—jesting!”

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She smiled and shook her head.

"No. I really am Princess Perrucini. Haven't you heard about me? They call me the 'Hidden Princess.' "

He was observing her wonderingly.

"But—Prince Perrucini—I'd heard he was in the neighborhood, but—it isn't possible you are—"

"I'm his daughter," she answered gravely. "I told you my father is a villain. Remember?"

He frowned.

"My mother," went on the girl slowly, "was Louise Van der Griff. She eloped with my father, you remember, when my grandmother refused to consent to the marriage?"

"No," answered Bradhurst, "I don't know about his history. I don't know His Highness personally."

"Naturally not," she replied. Then she went on, after a pause. "I've heard that he's not a really bad man—but he's weak, and a spendthrift—a butterfly sort of per-

son. After she'd married him, my mother discovered that they weren't at all suited to one another—that their ideas about life were different—and that he could not confine his affections to one woman. His heart was big enough to share among many, but my mother would not countenance that, as many of the noblewomen did. She took me and returned to her mother—my grandmother." Kara's eyes rested upon the castle for an instant as she paused.

"Were they divorced?" asked Bradhurst.

"Unfortunately no. My mother died shortly after our arrival in America—leaving me to my grandmother—the 'Griffin,' you know. You remember what I've told you about her?"

He nodded, his eyes on hers.

"She's as strong-willed as Napoleon was, I think—as wily and cunning as a fox—as firm and loyal in her affections as a woman can be, and utterly lovable. I adore her."

"I've seen her only once, but I am pre-

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pared to surrender at once to her charms when we meet," observed Bradhurst.

"Men always do, I've heard," said the girl. "Even my father admires her, though she has outwitted him for some fifteen years or so. You see, when my mother died, he was naturally my guardian, and learning that my grandmother had grown fond of me, he demanded possession of me, hoping to use me as a means of opening the 'Griffin's' purse whenever he chose. Understand? My grandmother refused to give me up, claiming that he was unfit to rear a child. She even tried to prove this, I believe, in the Italian courts but failed. Whereupon, my father appeared with the necessary legal support to wrest me from the 'Griffin' by force—only to find that I had disappeared."

"Disappeared?" repeated Bradhurst. "But—?"

"My grandmother," continued Kara smiling, "had kept up the legal battle simply to gain time for the erection of 'Balleyhoo.' When it was finished, she

moved into her new dwelling, and the Princess Kara Eugène Katherine Helène Louise has never been seen from that day to this. At intervals, the Prince appears with the necessary search warrants and *habeas corpus* writ and searches 'Balleyhoo' thoroughly, but without finding a clue to the missing princess."

Bradhurst stared incredulously.

"Do you mean that she holds you by force there in defiance of the law and has held you for over fifteen years?"

"No—she lets him in whenever he cares to search. She simply seems to be in ignorance of my whereabouts. Don't you see? The castle has innumerable secret rooms and passages, and I hide when the searchers come. The time required to drop the drawbridge and open the gates enables me to hide."

Bradhurst gasped. "What an idea!" cried he. "But doesn't your father lie in wait for you when you come out?"

"I never come out," she said—"at least



CHAPTER VII
CUPID'S WIRELESS



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CUPID'S WIRELESS

Bradhurst went home through the woods, his stride brisk, his shoulders back, his head high. He was amazingly happy. Another sort of man might have hesitated at marrying a daughter of Perrucini's, for the Italian was notorious throughout Europe as a charming rascal—in fact he was barred out of Paris entirely since the club scandal there three years before. Truth to tell, his long reign was about ended. As a boy, he had been so charmingly ingenuous and happy-go-lucky and so “devilish winning, y’know” that his company had been welcomed everywhere, and his escapades and intrigues were laughed away or frankly discredited; but as he grew older, his popularity waned. Men who had been glad to let him win their

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money, grew weary of his stories and found more congenial and less expensive company. Women deserted his shrine in honor of some younger Adonis—and so the name of Perrucini was held in growing ill-repute where society gathered. For, cast out of the highest circles, he had necessarily to win his way into the next, and when they tired of him, into the next lower, and once started, his decline very much resembled the progress of a heavy keg down a steep hill. His brain, too, lost its cunning when his fresh olive skin lost its gleam and his eyes their innocent smile, and so the pressing need for money had several times caused him to do things that threatened to seriously jeopardize his personal liberty.

But all this caused Bradhurst no uneasiness. His position in England had been for centuries so assured that he need have no fear of the union's wrecking him. And if there had been a risk involved, and he had thought of it, I am certain that he would still not have considered giving up the girl.

He was the sort of man who loves sincerely once—with all his heart and soul—and loves everlastingly. So he realized that he was blessed in having won the woman of his choice, for he was not the sort of man who could have found consolation in another woman's favors.

Therefore, he held his head high and whistled softly to himself as he ran up the wide bungalow steps and opened the door; and Wilkins, catching sight of his master's happy, eager face, breathed a profound sigh of thanksgiving. Dinner was waiting, for the valet had learned from experience that his lordship was apt to come in starving, after a day in the air, (he was naturally deprived of his tea) and Bradhurst bathed in haste and came to table in his ornate dressing-gown. All formality had been dispensed with since the going into exile; it seemed to his lordship a bit absurd to dress for dinner when he was dining alone on a mountain top miles from nowhere, but Wilkins was sorely troubled at the breach.

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He had been in service for nearly forty years, and *never before* had he owned as master a man who neglected to dress for dinner. It was almost unendurable,—this carelessness.

As Bradhurst sat down to dinner, there came a knock at the door and a small, stout, red-faced servant delivered a letter into Wilkins' keeping.

"I gets it yesterday from a lady which says I should bring it right away but I ain't had time until now," he said. "There be's no answer. I don't know the lady's name. She gives it to me in the village."

"Then how do you explain the fact that you don't know it?" asked Bradhurst curiously.

"She ain't told me," said the man, scratching his head.

"That sounds logical," observed Bradhurst, as Wilkins punctiliously presented the letter to him upon a plate. (There was no tray obtainable.)

"This be's the bunglo, ain't it?" said

the messenger. "I calculate it be's for you."

"The bungalow?" asked Bradhurst mildly.

"I says I calculate as the letter be's for you," repeated the native in a slightly louder tone of voice.

"Oh. No doubt I misunderstood you," said Bradhurst apologetically. "I'm very sorry. Yes. The letter is for me. Wilkins, offer the gentleman a gratuity."

"Yes, sir," said Wilkins, counting out some change. He had the air of a capitalist as the messenger seized the money with widening eyes.

"Thanks," said the fellow grinning. "That be's twict I'm paid for jist takin' a walk." And with a grin, he clapped on his cap and disappeared into the night. Wilkins retired into his own quarters, wondering if it *could* be a breach of honor among lower-class Americans to say "good-night" or to use some form of greeting.

Bradhurst tore open the letter, which

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bore Eleanore's crest, and let his eye run swiftly down the thick lavender sheet.

"Penn, Dear:—" wrote the Duchess,

"I'm afraid I've done a stupid thing, but when you've read all of this you'll understand that I blundered unconsciously, and—believe me—unwillingly. Do you know that your milkmaid is a princess—the daughter of Perrucini? I didn't. If you knew it and didn't tell me, you are responsible for what has happened—as well as for what may happen. I'm writing this at once in order to avert any serious consequences. I shall try to have it sent to you from the village so that no one will suspect I've forwarded the news.

"This place is crowded with second-class Americans (from the west mostly), with whom a title covers a multitude of sins. You can understand, under the circumstances, that dinners are a trying institution for me and that I am frequently driven to platitudes and

stories. How is one to talk to them, I ask you? Well, the night before last, on my return from your bungalow, I went in with a nice boy (the only presentable person here, really besides myself), and during the fish course (I think it was) he told me of his being a painter, and I told him about you and the wonderful picture you had done, and made a little story about your having discovered such a marvelous model in a milkmaid from 'Balleyhoo.' It seems that Perrucini overheard, and becoming interested, asked me to describe the girl. I did—to discover that your milkmaid is his daughter, hidden from him by Mrs. Van der Griff for some fifteen or sixteen years. He has not seen her in all that time, but he is certain this girl is she. Knowing his manner, you will not be surprised to learn that he speedily won over every person present by his rendering of the tale. It appears he is a heart-broken father

cruelly bereft of his child by a wicked old woman—a monster—and the entire household at this moment is in league to kidnap your sweetheart and carry her off from her grandmother's charge. They know (unfortunately I had admitted it) that she comes to pose for you every day, and I have no doubt but that they'll intercept her then—which will be the signal for a rain of gold for Perrucini, for of course the rascal wants her for purposes of ransom. He does not deceive me, though I must admit it is enough to cause the gentle tears to flow, to hear him recite his wrongs. How for fifteen long years he has watched over his child from afar, trying always to surprise the 'Van der' Griff, and always failing to retake his child.

“However—the point of this letter is—warn your little princess of her danger, and postpone the finishing of the picture for awhile. I'm wretchedly sorry to have

brought this about, but—I did it unintentionally, Penn. Now, I must stop before the others come up. I'll try to inform you if anything develops. I left the table before the rest in order to write this.


“Yours sincerely,
“ELEANORE.”

Bradhurst threw back his head and scowled at the ceiling. How in thunder could he warn her? They would be certain to act at once. Perrucini was wily enough to realize that the longer they delayed, the less likely they were to succeed. Tales travel quickly. Besides, there was the risk that the picture would be finished and then, naturally, the rendezvous under the big tree would cease. In all probability, the Italian would attempt to kidnap her the next day, so Bradhurst must reach her at once if he hoped to prevent it. If he knew the Prince's plans, the matter would be infinitely simpler, for if the intention was to

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waylay her on her way *to* the "studio," it would be necessary to warn her at once, while if they planned to catch her upon her way *back* to the castle, he could let them wait, and hide the girl somewhere else. If Eleanore had only waited until the plans were matured. Now, he must take no chances. He must try to reach Kara to-night.

He pushed back his chair, his dinner untasted, and was in the act of rising, when there came a curious sound from outside the window and he turned to see a white pigeon flapping its wings against the glass. He surveyed it idly, at first, his mind still busy with the problem of reaching Kara; the next instant, his blue eyes cleared. It was a carrier pigeon and there was a white paper tied to its leg! In an instant, he had crossed the room, opened the window and drawn in the bird. The message was written on the thick white paper that Kara had used before, and it was written in the girl's dashing, characteristic hand.



“*Lover:*

“The most *dreadful* things have happened! Peter—the gatekeeper—has informed the ‘Griffin’ that I am leaving the castle every day in Peggy’s clothes and we’ve all been arraigned for judgment; Peggy and Michael and I. Poor old Michael’s heart is nearly broken. He should have reported me, you see, but he is so fond of me, he *couldn’t* when I begged him not to, and of course, Peter—feeling the strength of his position—seized the opportunity of hitting at Michael. He and Michael have always disliked each other because they have been in the ‘Griffin’s’ employ for about the same length of time, and each one is jealous of the other. Besides, Peter thought it his *duty* to report me. He says he *couldn’t* endure the responsibility if anything had happened! So Michael and Peggy are in disgrace, and I am locked in the Tower-room, which is the secretest and strongest

corner of this big pile, from where it is impossible for me to escape. You can't get out of it unless the door is opened from the outside, and Peter is at the door! I can hear him walking about in the corridor as I write this. I wonder what he would say if he knew that I have Miss Mercury in here with me. (That's the name of the carrier-pigeon who is going to be my messenger. She was trained to carry messages from the 'Griffin' to Michael when Michael was occupying the bungalow, so I know she'll deliver my letter safely.)

"Lover, I'm not to see you again! The 'Griffin' has said it. Titles, she says, are the devil's trademarks on his own, and I shall never marry one. Of course, when it came out that I was meeting you every day in the woods, I *had* to tell her that we are in love with each other and that I am going to marry you. She cited my mother's case, of course, and asked me if I

wanted to bring my children up in a mountain-hole where they'll be afraid to so much as *peep* outside of the door! Of course I don't. I wouldn't want *anyone* to have such a miserable, monotonous existence, for no one could be happy in it no matter how many interesting things were brought from everywhere to amuse and occupy one! But I told her you are *different*. I'm sure if you were introduced to grandmother as Mr. Muggins she would *adore* you and *make* me marry you, whether I cared to or not, but Lord Bradhurst couldn't please her *because* he's Lord Bradhurst! She's such a funny, dear old lady.

"I don't mind being shut up here a bit—for the present—because I know the 'Griffin' means well, and *of course* you'll find some way of winning her over or of carrying me off, *soon*! If we are going to be as perfectly happy as I *think* we are, there's no use in wasting any more

time. I envy the Duchess because she has known you twenty-odd years longer than I have, and no matter *how* much I love you, I can never catch up to her. *Think* of it! I've lost those twenty-odd years!

"Please come for me soon, or call upon grandmother and paint her portrait and talk to her and fascinate her the way you did me. And above all, write to me at once. Miss Mercury will bring the message *straight* to me here in the Tower-room, and no one will know about it. Isn't it fun to have a secret? I shall be able to tell you anything I please and you can answer. It's like a wireless telegraph—only infinitely more romantic.

"I send you *all* of my love and *billions* of kisses.

"KARA."

Bradhurst read the letter through five times, rang for Wilkins and continued his

dinner, referring to the missive three times more as his mind dwelt upon several particular points. With an expression that indicated the impossibility of anything ever surprising him again, Wilkins served; even his side-whiskers seemed to stand firm with resignation. Miss Mercury, meanwhile strolled about the room nonchalantly, her small bright eyes darting right and left as though to say: "*I brought that paper that seems to please him so much!*"

Afterward, when Wilkins had actually blushed over Bradhurst's praise of the dessert, his lordship seated himself at the big desk, selected the necessary stationery, envelopes, ink and pen, and prepared himself for the agonies of composition. He began by staring frowningly at the paper for fully twenty minutes; then he dipped the pen-point into the ink, leaned forward and began:—

"Wonderful Person:—

*"I've never written a love-letter
in my life and I don't know how to*

begin—though I want to fearfully. So if this is not precisely according to rule, forgive me and have patience. No doubt I'll learn eventually. I've been sitting here for twenty minutes or so trying to imagine how the thing should be done but my imagination seems not to be fit. I can *think* of a lot of things I should like you to know, but I can't seem to *say* them somehow. Anyway, the important thing is that I love you absurdly, even though I can't think of a lot of different ways to say it. Hold that one fact fast—and believe it—because it's *true*—and perhaps you won't mind my not being able to write movingly about moonlight-on-the-lake—and rose-covered cottages—and stars—and so on.

“I'm glad you are not going to leave the castle for the present because the Prince seems to have a plan on foot to kidnap you. I heard of it to-night from the

Duchess and I was just wracking my brain for some way to warn you, when Miss Mercury arrived. Wasn't that an odd coincidence?

"I haven't decided yet whether I'll call upon the 'Griffin' as you advise, or carry you off. There are a great many difficulties in the way of both courses, I think. But you can rest assured that your imprisonment will not last very long. I don't know how I shall get through the days without you. I was absolutely wretched, you know, those days you didn't come. And as for being impatient—well—when I think of your sitting up there all alone when *I* could be with you, it seems like sinful waste of precious time; and I get simply *wild!* When you stop to think of it, we waste about half of our lives in sleeping (I think you pointed that out to me) and another third in eating, and then we've each lived about a third before we met. You can figure out for yourself

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how much we've left to share.
It's most unjust and distressing!


"Write me another letter tomorrow and maybe I'll be able to do the trick better a second time. Practice makes perfect, one hears. Aren't you sorry I haven't been in love with a lot of other girls, so that I would make a more satisfactory lover? As it is, I am compelled to depend upon my imagination and—I have it. My eye just lighted upon a novel in the book-rack as I wrote 'imagination' and I got an inspiration. I'll look out a love-story to-night and get a few pointers.

"Yours entirely,

"BRADHURST.

"P. S. Don't forget! I love you, no end! Good night."

In his search for a bit of cord, he found his check-book and an idea seized him. He tore out a check from the back and made it out carefully. His crest was in one corner—in the other, his name engraved upon the



paper. Then came "Bank of England," and then, "Pay to the order of" and a blank. He inserted her name—Princess Kara Eugénie Katherine Hélène Louise Perrucini—though he had to write ridiculously small to get it all in. On the next line he left a blank for the number to be filled in, and in place of "dollars," wrote "kisses." Then he signed his name. This he folded and tied with the letter about Miss Mercury's leg; then he opened the window and let her go. She circled twice and soared off in the direction of the castle, and Bradhurst, slowly closing the window, brought out the picture, stood it across the arms of a big carved chair, and lighting his pipe, seated himself before it. The girl gazed out at him with wistful, dreaming eyes, her lips just beginning to smile, her bosom almost seeming to stir with life. It was so vital a bit of work that it was almost like a view from a window and the interest did not end with the excellence of the art. There was a story, there, too—if one could

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only read. Bradhurst understood it, and as his eyes met the painted ones through the rising smoke-rings, he smiled, and it seemed to him that the girl in the picture smiled back. But of course, that was simply fancy.

Wilkins, looking most disapproving, brought Miss Mercury to the bedside the following morning at eleven, with a second letter fastened to her leg.

“*Lover-Man*:—

“I’m so glad you can’t write love-letters and that you’ve not loved anyone but me. Don’t you *dare* read up on the subject and try to become proficient. You express yourself quite well enough to please me, for there’s *truth* in every line of your letter, Lover-Man, and *that’s* what is really important. I’m sorry for all the other girls in the world who can’t have you. Am I very selfish, I wonder, for being glad you belong

entirely to me? I couldn't let you go—you know. You're *so* wonderful. I've spent *years* of my life deciding just what sort of man I should *want* to fall in love with me, and—you are *infinitely* bigger and braver and handsomer, really you are.

"I'll tell you a secret. I was ashamed to say it, but I can write it. Is that cowardly? *I fell in love with you the very first time I saw you—in spite of the beard and everything.* I couldn't help it. It was exactly as if you had walked out of one of my own dreams! Was that very forward of me? Would the girls you have known in the world do that? I'll wager the Duchess couldn't. She'd have to wait until she had known the man years and years and had been properly urged to care for him. I'm afraid I'm very impulsive. Of course, I shouldn't have *mentioned* the subject to you, nor could I even have *hinted* that I was in

love with you, but I couldn't help *being* in love with you.

"Did you dream about me last night? I went to sleep with your funny wonderful letter under my pillow, but I didn't dream about you. I was so *furious* when I awoke, that I *had* to write to you at once. I hope Miss Mercury won't disturb you.

"Wasn't that astonishing—my letter coming just while you were wondering how to reach me! It shows that we are attuned to each other and that we are sympathetic and all that, doesn't it? My father's abduction plans will go sadly amiss, I'm afraid. Won't he be disgusted if he hides in the woods and waits for me—hours and *hours*? I hope the grass isn't too damp.

"Do you love me as much as you did yesterday? You must promise to tell me if ever you love me the *least* bit less. I should die if I didn't know, though I fancy I

could guess. But you'll never love me any less, will you? *Promise!* You must just go on loving me more and more and *more*—as *I* am condemned to do. It's *awful* to love anyone—it gives him such a power over you! To think that your smiles or frowns mean my happiness or misery! It frightens me! You'll be good to me, won't you? But I'm afraid you'll never love me enough. How many times a day will you kiss me? *Answer this.* It is *most* important.

“What are you going to do to release me? If we elope, my grandmother might not leave her money to me, and one hears that money is a very necessary thing out in the world. I've seen it, but I've never needed any, for I've never been anywhere that it could be spent. Are you brave enough to call upon her and ask for me? I'm afraid she'll say 'no.' (I can just *see* her say it, with her eyes

intermissions for my pipe and my meals. I am sure you will not deny me those necessities. And of course I shall love you always, because you will never grow old like the rest of the world. The people one loves never do. As for the novels, when you read this you'll know that I haven't had any instructions.

"I mean to call upon the 'Griffin' to-day if I can get across the draw-bridge, partly because I liked the one glance I got of her, and partly because I'd prefer marrying you with her consent, though I'll marry you, of course, either way. But we shall not need her money, you Funny Person. I've plenty for two, and I daresay we shall be able to manage. If you've nothing to do, you might make a list of the things you need every year and then I shall be able to decide whether or not I can afford you. I suppose, though, you'll need a lot more things out in the world.

"I love you lots more to-day than I did yesterday, if that's possible. I spent half the night talking to your picture and making plans, so if I *have* slept late this morning, it's your fault. (I almost said 'Dear' that time without thinking. You see, I *am* learning. I knew I should. The next time, I'll *say* it!)

"I forgot to tell you that sometimes I am very peevish when I awake. I haven't been since I came up here, but I always used to be troubled that way at home. Do you mind that very much? That's about my worst fault, I think—except, perhaps, my impulsiveness, and my hot-headedness, and my thoughtlessness. It's much more sensible to warn you before you have definitely sworn to spend the rest of your life in my company.

"And now to my confession. *I fell in love with you at first sight, too!* Honest Injun! I couldn't help it, you looked so utterly deli-

cious and sweet and young and innocent and beautiful and—everything nice! And though I'd never thought much about the kind of girl I should fall in love with sometime (I fancy men don't get so much time for dreams of that sort) I knew the instant I saw you break through that hedge that you were the only girl on earth I ever could fall in love with. So I recognized you, in a way, you see. Maybe I'd been dreaming about you subconsciously, too. Anyway, I seemed to know what I wanted when I *found* it!

"I love you to be different from all the other girls in the world.

"I think perhaps it is your difference that keeps me thinking about you all the time to the exclusion of everything else, and makes me want you desperately, and love you so very, very ridiculously!

"I'll write to you again after my visit to the 'Griffin.' If you answer this one meantime, Wilkins

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has orders to take care of Miss Mercury.

“Yours eternally,

“BRADHURST.

“P. S.—By jove, I think I’ve done it this time! Reading back a little, this is uncommonly like a love-letter, you know. You’ll be suspecting me of deceiving you about previous affairs after one or two more trials, I fancy. Cross my heart, I haven’t been reading up!”

CHAPTER VIII
THE “GRIFFIN”



CHAPTER VIII

THE "GRIFFIN"

Bradhurst arrayed himself for conquest; brushed his light hair until it shone and every strand lay in its proper position; donned his hat, gloves and stick and set out bravely for the castle, a Bradhurst from the tip of his immaculate boots to the northernmost point of him. He was really more appropriately dressed for London than for Twenty Miles from Nowhere, but his appearance was intended to assure the "Griffin" that he was no vulgar adventurer amusing himself with an unsophisticated girl—and truly, no one who cast a glance over him could have mistaken him. He was an extraordinarily well-looking chap, was Bradhurst—with the sort of eyes and

the sort of smile that only a man of his sort can have.

As he reached the drawbridge and sounded the bell as he had seen Peggy do, the bridge dropped slowly into place and he started across it with a horrid feeling somewhere inside him that it would begin to rise again before he got across and consequently tumble him swiftly into the cold waters of the moat; but he conquered the desire to run, and, of course, nothing happened. As he reached the gateway, the huge gates swung back, disclosing the smooth lawns and white drives and swaying rose-hedges of the courtyard within—and standing by the gates was Michael. In spite of his amazement, Bradhurst saluted the old fellow cordially.

“Morning,” said Michael briefly. He closed the gates as his lordship advanced, and dropped the bolt. His pipe was gone, but he chewed ruminatingly upon a long stem of wild-grass. “Disgraced,” he said in explanation. “Not allowed out.” His

face flushed with the humiliation of his position and his withered brown hand upon the iron bolts trembled.

"Never mind, old chap," said Bradhurst. "It'll all come out right."

Michael nodded slowly, his mild eyes flashing his thanks for the encouragement.

"Straight on up the path," he said. "You'll find the Madame in the little summerhouse."

"Right!" said Bradhurst, remembering his mission, and he went slowly up the drive his courage faltering.

"Rot!" he told himself scornfully. "Afraid of a woman, are you? Afraid to ask for the girl you pretend to be in love with! You bally ass!"

Then his eye lit upon the little white marble summerhouse, and the little old lady in black, seated in the sun within it, and his spirits rose with a bound. (Between you and me, I wonder at that, for she was a most fearsome-looking person, was the "Griffin," that day.) She sat upon a marble

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seat upheld by two fierce marble griffins (he wondered if her nick-name amused her) and the ebony cane, topped with silver, rested at her side. Her white hair was dressed high and held with jet combs; in her ears, were long ear-rings of sparkling jet. Her black eye-brows and blacker eyes made the whiteness of her skin and hair seem almost unnatural, and the firm lines of her red lips gave the whole face its grim expression. In her lap she held an ivory and gold writing-desk, but she was not writing. She had been staring off across her gardens with a strangely thoughtful look, when she heard Bradhurst's step and turning, observed him. She did not rise as he advanced, nor did her expression alter greatly. Her keen black eyes ran swiftly over him from head to foot, estimating; but what the result of her scrutiny was, she did not betray.

"Mrs. Van der Griff?" asked Bradhurst, whipping off his hat and smiling. "I think it must be."

"Does my reputation describe me so accurately?" she asked in a calm, low-toned voice.

Bradhurst laughed.

"On the contrary, I was expecting to be rather frightened—but I'm not. I recognized you because Michael told me I should find you here."

"You're quite sure you're not frightened?" she asked.

"Quite!" said Bradhurst positively, amused at the fashion in which this very unusual old lady was conducting the interview.

"Don't young people have consciences now-a-days?" she inquired curiously, as one who desired to be informed.

"Not always. I have a *very* lively one, though."

"Sit down," said the "Griffin," realizing that he was not at all ill at ease upon his feet before her. Most men, she reflected, would have stood like school-boys awaiting a reprimand. Bradhurst murmured

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"thanks" and seated himself upon the bench that directly faced hers. And he met the fierce black eyes as though they were not the most disconcerting eyes he had ever met in his life.

"I'm disappointed," he told her after an instant, shaking his head very gravely. "You're a sham!"

"I beg your pardon?" cried the "Griffin" in accents that would have terrified an average man, but the importance of Bradhurst's mission raised him above the average. He didn't quail.

"I say I'm disappointed in you. I expected a *real* griffin. You're not dreadful at *all* underneath. I suspect you've cultivated your reputation to protect you from impositions."

The "Griffin" clutched her cane with both hands and leaning forward, stared into Bradhurst's smiling blue eyes.

"Young man," she said grimly, "I'm disappointed, too. I expected to meet a fool."

"Was there anything particularly foolish

in my falling in love with your granddaughter?" he asked. She *almost* smiled.

"No—that indicates sound common-sense. The question is, do you love her for the virtues I have carefully instilled in her, or for—more material reasons. Don't be complimented because I said you are not a fool. I'm not sure that you are not a very clever rogue."

"In either case, then," said Bradhurst gravely, "we are agreed that I'm clever. The point of difference is whether or not I'm honest."

"I wonder," said the "Griffin," "that I am discussing you at all. I hardly see how your honesty or dishonesty can affect me."

"Surely you are interested in your granddaughter."

"But my grand-daughter—"

"Has promised to become my wife," said Bradhurst. "Would you sanction our marriage without even determining what sort of man I am?"

"I've not the least intention of sanction-

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ing your marriage, sir. The very idea is too absurd to discuss."

"I suppose," Bradhurst mused, "that I must swallow that very uncomplimentary remark because I have not been properly presented. And it would be unjust to expect discrimination from a woman who has lived so long out of the world."

The "Griffin" *did* smile at that. It was a faint, rather grim sort of smile, to be sure, but nevertheless it was distinctly a smile, and Bradhurst mentally claimed "first blood" for himself.

"You are Edgar Penniston, a painter, I believe," asked the "Griffin" politely.

"No, I am Edgar Penniston Bradhurst—Lord Bradhurst."

"My nephew mentioned that he had loaned the bungalow to a protégé of his—Edgar Penniston. I recall the name distinctly."

"Yes. I was traveling *incognito*."

"Indeed?" The old lady put a variety of insinuations in her tone.

Bradhurst remained calmly silent. The "Griffin" watched him curiously and it was she who broke the long pause that fell between them.

"Since you have honored my granddaughter with a proposal of marriage," said she, "as her natural guardian, I claim the right to question you concerning any portion of your affairs."

"I take it, then, that you are considering my proposal?"

The "Griffin" smiled again.

"Yes," she said, nodding her white head, and then after a moment, she asked, "may I inquire the reason for this *incognito*?"

Bradhurst flushed. "It was necessary for me to drop out of sight for a time. I had a duel with a chap in London—and it ended disastrously for him."

"You killed him?" cried the "Griffin." Bradhurst regarded her for an instant, wide-eyed, then he threw back his head and laughed heartily. The "Griffin" waited in some surprise.

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"I haven't the least idea," cried Bradhurst. "I've forgotten to ask."

The "Griffin" bit her lips and frowned.

"It seems to me you hold life in small regard," she said.

"Lives like his," said Bradhurst. "He was unfit to live."

"But you jeopardized yours."

"I thought the cause worthy."

"May I ask what was the cause?" asked the old lady eagerly.

"He slandered a woman—in my club—a woman whom I've known all my life."

She leaned back and regarded him thoughtfully.

"One would judge you to be rather impulsive," she said, "if not quite hot-headed and reckless."

"My one fault," said Bradhurst genially.

"It's a grave one," said the "Griffin."

"But not grave enough to interfere with my winning your grand-daughter, surely!"

"If that were the one objection, no, but there is another—one quite too formidable

to be overcome. She shall never marry a titled man."

"I might relinquish my title?"

The "Griffin" shook her head until her long jet ear-rings swung.

"It isn't the fact that you are titled that matters; but titled men are reared after a fashion that makes them unfit for husbands. They are not at all like other men. They are 'spoiled' from the cradle—their mentality cramped, their superficial qualities developed, their ornamental accomplishments encouraged at the expense of their usefulness. The whole idea of aristocracy is wrong. Kara is my one direct descendant, and I mean to see that her offspring are real men and women."

"You are quite right," observed Bradhurst gravely. "The majority of titled persons are all you say—but I am not. I've lived a man's life. I've travelled—I've been in the army—I've worked at the one thing I can do—my painting. If you could see my portrait of your grand-daughter,

you would understand that it is not a mere fad with me, but a real work. Surely, you will not condemn me upon such sweeping charges, without examining into my individual merits. You couldn't permit your prejudices to influence you that far."

"Lord Bradhurst," said the "Griffin," "my daughter married a nobleman—against my will—a man most clever and charming. She regretted it all the rest of her life."

"You may not realize that you insult me even to compare me with him. The Bradhursts have a record that shows none of his ilk among their number."

The "Griffin" shrugged.

"Then I have no chance?" asked Bradhurst.

"I'm afraid not. You seem a nice boy, and you are good-looking, almost too good-looking, I can understand her being infatuated—but—she'll recover from that in time. My point is this: You seem quite alright now—but Perrucini did, too—at first. I

think the taint is in all of you, though, and I can't permit Kara to risk it."

"You realize that you are sacrificing my happiness and hers?"

"To secure her lasting happiness, yes. And surely you are not so absurd as to imagine that you will never meet another girl who will please you *quite* as well, and who will be better fitted to lead the life you will want to lead?"

"I have never loved anyone before," said Bradhurst slowly. "I've never had a hundred and one affairs as most fellows have. It doesn't seem the least likely to me that I'll ever find anyone again. You don't understand, I'm afraid. I'm absurd enough to believe that there's one girl in the world intended for every man—his mate—that no other woman can mean as much to him—and I know that this girl is my mate—the complement of my being."

He rose slowly and smiled.

"I suppose you think me quite impossible?" he said.

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"On the contrary," she smiled slightly. "If *I* were a girl and you were asking for me, I should be inclined to consent—just for the madness of it—for the sake of being loved divinely; but I'm an old woman, and I know from experience that such loves do not last, and I care so much for my granddaughter that I want to spare her the disillusionment that would surely follow."

"The love you have known wasn't *this* kind of love if it didn't last," he said obstinately. Then he offered her his hand with a smile. "Do you know," he added, "that she is a good deal like you in many ways. I can tell you that now without fear of being suspected of flattery. I think—if you could have given me Kara—you and I would have become jolly good pals."

"Quite possibly," said the "Griffin" gravely. "I feel the thing myself." She shook his hand cordially. "You are a nice boy," she said. "It's a pity you had to be born at the top of the ladder. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Bradhurst, and then he

turned and went down the path toward the gate. The "Griffin," gazing after him, noted the determined set of his broad shoulders, the carriage of his head, the firmness of his stride, and she smiled. It was astonishing what a transformation that smile worked. She seemed suddenly years younger and infinitely gentler and more kind.

"Obstacles," she meditated calmly, "are often very good things."

Bradhurst returned home through the woods and found Miss Mercury awaiting him, with an answer to his last letter.

"*Lover-Man*.—" Kara had written this time,

"I'm so anxious to hear about your meeting with grandmother I can hardly wait. I'm *sure* she'll fall in love with you, and there's a *possibility* that you'll be able to win her over. Oh, if you only *can*!

“I was a very reprehensible sort of person this morning. Grandmother visited me to ask about you at some length and she laughed at me when I told her how much I love you (I love you *heaps*, you know) and said all girls have several such attacks before they finally marry. Then, I’m afraid, I misbehaved. I told her it was absurd to keep me locked up like a child—that I should be unhappy as long as I lived if I couldn’t marry you—that I’d *been* unhappy anyway shut up here all my nineteen years and the only way she could make it up to me was by letting me marry you. Of course, I shouldn’t have said that, because even if I have been unhappy it has not been her fault. She’s done her very best to keep me contented—bringing me white peacocks from India—dolls from all over the world—and a teeny weeny pony that walked upstairs and was just like a dog about the house—

and oh, hundreds of other wonderful things; and I'd have been lots *more* unhappy if she'd let my father have me. Can you *imagine* my being so ungrateful after she's been so brave and good and thoughtful for my welfare? I must be a horrid person really to be *able* to act so, but I did want you so badly, and I thought of some other woman being nice to you and winning you away from me and marrying you and—I just couldn't *endure* it. *Of course* I begged her pardon *instantly*, and she forgave me, and we parted friends, though she *didn't* say I might marry you; and I'm still locked up here. She said I might come out if I would give my word of honor not to see you any more, but I wouldn't give it. I know I couldn't keep it. The very instant the door is unlocked I shall fly to you. I can't help it. I spend most of the time, now, remembering what you look like and trying to recall every-

thing you've ever said to me. It's—*dreadful* to be so *deep* in love. I wonder if anyone else ever loved anybody as *fiercely* as I love you? I don't believe even Juliette did. I *don't*. . . .

"I always have hundreds of gowns, of course, and rows and *rows* of shoes—and other things beyond any possible needs, but don't worry. I can run barefoot and do with *one* gown if I have you. Of course, it would be nice to have pretty things if I *could*, because I'm afraid if I don't try to keep myself as beautiful as I can, you might fall *out* of love with me, but I'd rather run any risk rather than do without you *utterly*. And I know I shall die if ever you do stop loving me. I know I shall. It isn't imagination, *truly*!

"Please write to me *as soon as you get back*, and tell me *exactly* what happened. And if she didn't even promise to think it over, come for me at once, and carry me off, or

I shall stop loving you. Now that ought to bring you to terms if you care the least bit about me. (Even if it isn't true; I *couldn't* stop loving you, any more than I could stop breathing. I'm like a slave—doomed to love you endlessly, now, as long as life lasts. It isn't fair—unless you love me, too—just as much. Don't forget to say you do! It's *most* important!)

"Is the picture done? Can you go on with it, now, without me? It seems to me I've heard about painting from memory.

"Have you seen the Duchess? I'm terribly jealous of her. I get to fancying you with her, sometimes, and I get up and bite my lips and clench my hands and walk the floor until Peter peeps in to see if I'm trying to escape. And once I got out my dagger. Did I ever tell you about that? I got it when I was a very small youngster, to keep at hand in case my father ever *should* succeed in finding me, and I

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firmly intended to defend myself with it to the limit of endurance—even though it *is* only a few inches long and quite flexible. It was a toy, you know, but I ground the edge sharp on the stones, and so it became really dangerous. That's the Italian blood in me, isn't it—that instinct toward daggers. I'll wager the duchess would scream at the sight of one. I love the bright, cruel gleam of them—though I couldn't kill, you know—because I couldn't bear to give pain—or cause grief.

“I've been writing notes to myself, addressing them to Lady Bradhurst, and signing all sorts of names. Such funny notes, they are, too—some of them; invitations to teas and dinners, bills for gowns and *follies*, acceptances and regrets to my invitations, and every other sort of correspondence. It's a new game to me—pretending to be Lady Bradhurst—and I *like* it.

"I love you with all my heart and all my soul and all my strength and I *want* you. I'm starving for kisses! And I want to be hugged *tight* in your arms, so that I can feel your heart beat! (I *did* once when you hugged me!) And I want you to tell me things. *Can't* you write them as well as you can say them? Just pretend you are *talking* to me and write *that* way.

"It seems a million years since I've seen you. Everything dies as soon as you go away. It doesn't even cheer me much to remember that you are coming for me sometime, and that no one else has the least right to you, and that you belong to me and I am quite absolutely—

"Yours."

Bradhurst answered this with ten big sheets of closely written script, and as he mastered the unfamiliar method of expression (he had always detested writing things) his style became *very* much more

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satisfactory. Wilkins—chancing to pass through—shook his head gravely as his master stared at him unseeingly and chewed the end of the penholder—and Miss Mercury strutted about with an air of importance and blinked every time he turned a sheet. The sun came through the window upon Bradhurst's light head, but he was too absorbed to think of drawing the shade, though the golden light annoyed him. He had time for nothing, in fact, but the business in hand, and the girl at the top of the tower of "Balleyhoo" realized that when the missive finally reached her; and reading of his devotion and his sincerity in every line, she hugged the fat letter and laughed and wept over it.

Bradhurst, meanwhile, had drawn out the canvas again and was hard at work in the living-room of the bungalow. He couldn't endure returning to the deserted "studio" to work, and the light in the house was good enough for all that remained to be done. It was practically completed—save for a touch

here and there—a softening of lines—a few finishing strokes to foliage and drapery. The face and head and hands were quite perfect as they were.

As he drew back at last, in the dying light of sunset, and surveyed what he had done, his heart almost stopped beating at the wonder of it! It was a living, breathing girl who sat dreaming there in the picture—a girl of flesh and blood whose lips seemed to quiver with the tensivity of her breathing, and the woods—one could feel the mystery of them, smell the wood-smells, hear the wood-sounds, feel the breath against one's face. . . . But the girl herself was what caught the eye and held it. Wilkins, coming up behind his master to announce that the warm bath was waiting, let his sentence die in midair as his eyes fell upon the picture, and so Bradhurst knew that he had not over-estimated his achievement. Wilkins had responded to the picture's appeal as Bradhurst had wanted his audience to respond. His sud-

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den silence—his instinctive fear of arousing the girl from her dreams—*that* was worth striving for—and Bradhurst knew that it was her influence that had given him the power. Nothing that he had ever done could compare with this! The others were flat—photographic beside it. She had given his touch the humanness that it lacked.

CHAPTER IX
WITH HER GRACE'S ASSISTANCE

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Old Michael appeared, wildly excited, while Bradhurst was still in his bath, and in spite of Wilkins' dignified protests, made his way up the stairs to the very door of the room. There, he and Wilkins engaged in a linguistic combat that violated the peace to such an extent that his lordship was compelled to wrap himself in a bath-sheet and put out his head.

"Whatever is the row?" he asked grumbly. "It is a fine country where a chap can't even have his bath in peace."

Michael waved Wilkins impatiently to one side and faced Bradhurst. He had his gun in his hand, and his clothes were in great disorder.

"Peggy's gone, sir," he said.

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"I beg your pardon?" cried Bradhurst.

"*Peggy's gone*," he repeated, his voice hoarse with anxiety. "I missed her noon-time when I went t' leave her lunch in the holly tree. Thought she wuz somewharabouts. Must a' ben gone then. Cows cum home 'thout her—an' I ben all through the woods. She bein't thar."

"Where is she?" asked Bradhurst.

"That's what I'm tryin' t' find out. Hunt her if I hafta cover the country!" He clenched his gun with sudden violence. "My daughter," he said. "Comin'?"

"Wait!" said Bradhurst. He disappeared to issue forth an instant later wrapped in his dressing-gown.

"Can you think of any place she might have gone?" he asked.

Michael shook his head wearily.

"Nope. Ain't no fella ben chasin' her. Didn't run with no one in the village. Didn't have no money t' go nowhere."

"Then," said Bradhurst nodding, "Per-rucini's got her."

"What?" roared Michael hoarsely.

"He's been planning to kidnap Kara. Heard that she was leaving the castle to pose for me in the woods, and he thought he'd succeed in trapping her. I knew about that from a lady staying at his place. Well—don't you see? He's mistaken Peggy for Kara—and he's kidnapped her instead."

Michael reflected.

"He ain't seen his girl sence she wuz four," he said thoughtfully.

"That's the answer," said Bradhurst. "I'll ride over there with you, if you like, and we'll see if that isn't the way of it. You've no need to worry, I'm sure."

"Reckon you're right," drawled Michael slowly. "Sounds straight. Ain't no other place she could a' went—round har."

"I'll dress in a few minutes," said Bradhurst amiably. "Sit down there and smoke."

"Ain't no great shakes," answered the old man. "Take your time."

He threw himself into the big arm-chair

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with a sigh and filled his pipe; Bradhurst disappeared into the dressing-room, from whence came the various sounds connected with dressing—occasional curses—orders to Wilkins—the noise of sliding drawers—the ripping of an unsuitable collar.

It was while he was engaged in selecting his cravat, that there came an imperative knocking at the door below. Bradhurst growled, Michael tilted the big chair back upon its four legs, and Wilkins started for the door. His lordship came forth, wearing his evening clothes, and settling his waistcoat. Michael stared.

“I’ve got to, you know,” explained Bradhurst, “if I ride over to Perrucini’s place with you.”

Michael grunted and blew out a great puff of smoke. Both men up-stairs were listening curiously for some sound from below, but they heard nothing until Wilkins’ steps sounded again upon the stairs and he arrived an instant later carrying his shoulders with an air of importance.

"Her Grace the Duchess of Dunderry, sir," said he.

"Is the Duchess down-stairs?" asked Bradhurst curiously.

"Yes, sir."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Wait here," said Bradhurst quickly, and hurrying down the stairs he came upon Eleanor standing quite motionless before the portrait. She was in a lavender dinner gown, cut quite low, and leaving her throat and shoulders and white arms bare. She wore no jewels, save for the bird-of-paradise studded with pearls in her hair, and about her shoulders she had thrown a shawl of silver tissue.

"It *is* you, then," said Bradhurst. "I thought—won't you sit down?"

He set a wide carved chair for her, and she sank into it, smiling faintly.

"I seem to have contracted the habit of calling upon you, lately," she said.

"I shall never complain of that," smiled

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Bradhurst, "though it *is* a rather reckless thing to do, you know—especially—"

"Especially for the wife of the Duke of Dunderry," she finished for him as he halted uncertainly. "Yes—I'll admit it *is* a bit reckless—my coming here, but—I came upon impulse." She shrugged her white shoulders lightly.

"Has anything happened?" asked Bradhurst gently.

"A number of things. Did you imagine I came to this place just to pay you a friendly visit?"

"You said—you'd come on impulse—and I wondered—" He was obviously ill at ease for some reason that was quite beyond his conception, and it bothered him. He had known Eleanore for years, so there was no earthly reason why he should feel uncomfortable when she was about, but the fact remained that lately, he *had* been feeling uncomfortable. He tried determinedly to eliminate the awkwardness from the situation, but it was impossible. And her eyes,

fixed in some amusement upon him, sent the blood to his face.

"Do you know that Perrucini has kidnapped one of the milkmaids from 'Balley-hoo'?" she asked, terminating the long pause.

"Yes," cried Bradhurst, swiftly forgetting himself and his unpleasant situation. "Her father is up-stairs, now. We were intending to call upon His Highness later to inquire for her."

"You wouldn't get her," said the Duchess.

Bradhurst stared. "Wouldn't get her? Do you mean he thinks she is his daughter?"

"Oh, no! He understands that he has been checkmated, but he means to turn the affair to his advantage."

"How?" asked Bradhurst curiously.

"He has been interviewing her since noon—cross-questioning her, drawing out what he can by smooth words—and the rest by frightening her."

"Frightening her?" repeated Bradhurst frowning.

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“Yes. She’s a simple minded little thing, you know—and—rather fanciful, I take it. When he found he couldn’t persuade her to give up the secrets of the castle or to sell them, he swore he would torture her until she told. Frightened her with stories of thumb-screws, you know, and whippings, and even black-dungeons infested with rats, I believe. I wasn’t present, but the girl told me some of it afterward, and my maid told me some. Of course, he hadn’t the least intention of touching her, but he made her think he was in earnest.”

“She didn’t—tell?” cried Bradhurst eagerly.

“After two hours of it—yes. Then they went into executive session to plan a visit to the castle for to-night, and I managed to see Peggy. She told me all that she had told Perrucini and begged me to get word to the castle before he could get there. She’s heart-broken at what she has done.”

“Poor little girl,” smiled Bradhurst.

“I didn’t go to the castle,” said Eleanore

slowly, "because—I thought you'd like to have the pleasure of warning them. The Princess will be quite unsafe there in a few hours. She must be gotten away before they come or there will be no possible chance for you."

"Do you mean there's really a possibility of their getting in?"

"There's a certainty that they will get in. It seems if you signal a certain way, the drawbridge will be dropped at any hour of the day or night and they know that signal. And they know how to get into the secret rooms and how many rooms there are and *where* they are."

"Then we'd better act at once," cried Bradhurst.

"No—she'll be quite safe for an hour or two yet. They mean to wait until after the 'Griffin's' bed-time. Perrucini has almost a superstitious dread of her."

Bradhurst began to stride up and down impatiently, his brows lowered, his blue eyes serious.

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"Where can we hide her?" he asked meditatively.

"Why should we hide her?" asked the Duchess.

"*Why*—?" repeated Bradhurst, looking up at her.

"Why not marry her—and end this little cur's persecution."

"Elope?" cried Bradhurst, his face brightening.

"Yes. It won't be a genuine elopement, of course, because we'll probably have to take grandmother, but—"

"Grandmother?" smiled Bradhurst. "That is where you are wrong. The 'Griffin' has rejected me as a grandson-in-law, and she has locked Kara up in the Tower-room because she won't give me up."

"Then it will be a *real* elopement," said the Duchess calmly. "You love her, don't you, Penn? You're quite sure?"

"Absolutely certain."

"And she—you think she cares, too?"

"Yes."

"You're sure it's not just a fancy? She's seen very few men, you know."

"It's love, Nell," he said gravely.

"Very well. There's a minister in Eden. I found that out from one of the servants at Perrucini's and in this country or county or state or something—you don't need a license—or at least—a minister can issue one and marry you immediately. Then—you're safe from interference. Neither the 'Griffin' nor Perrucini can trouble you."

Bradhurst beamed. "Nell," he cried earnestly, "you're a—a trump! I—I'll never forget this, I swear."

The Duchess smiled. "I'm doing the best I can for you, Penn," she said. And her voice, though Bradhurst never knew it, had a very faint note of wistfulness in it. There was so much more she would have done—gladly—if only he had asked. But Bradhurst didn't suspect.

They called down Michael after a while, and the old chap was so grateful for what

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the Duchess had done to avert the consequences of Peggy's disclosures, that he promptly joined in the conspiracy to outwit the "Griffin" and the Prince. He stipulated as his one condition that he be allowed to deal with Peter, who still stood guard at Kara's door, and to this they willingly agreed. (Later on, he handled that portion of the escapade most effectually.) Wilkins was dispatched (mighty in his own importance) to the village to prepare the minister for the arrival of the bridal couple and ordered to return, then, and prepare the very best supper he knew how. And finally, with all arrangements made, Bradhurst and the Duchess and Michael, screened by the velvety darkness, set off for the Castle of "Balleyhoo."

They went in the big motor that had brought the Duchess from Perrucini's place (Bradhurst never knew to whom it belonged) the Duchess and Bradhurst on the front seat, old Michael in the tonneau, and they went so quietly that they did not dis-

turb even the sleeping Forest People. Once or twice an owl did start up with an inquisitive "Who-o? Who-o?" But the trees and the bushes waved warning arms and whispered "Hush-sh-sh," and the wise birds settled back upon their comfortable boughs and continued their philosophical musings. The moonlight flooded the Forest World with silver and electrified the night with its subtle madness; the south wind sped across the wooded spaces and gathered all the sweetest scents, mingling them into a new perfume in honor of the night; and the stars came out to decorate the bridal canopy.

At the tall stone gate-posts, where the big stone griffins guarded the entrance to the drawbridge, Michael signalled, and the huge bridge dropped slowly downward into place. The run across it was accomplished noiselessly and fortunately it was Karl who guarded the gates at the other side of the moat. Upon being assured that it was really old Michael who demanded entrance, he threw back the barriers, and the motor

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passed swiftly through into the white driveway beyond. There were three chief lieutenants in the "Griffin's" bodyguard—Michael, Peter and Karl—and they were extremely jealous of one another, but the one of them that happened at the moment to enjoy the "Griffin's" favor, had always the other two arrayed against him. Therefore, since it was Peter who basked in the "Griffin's" smiles at that particular instant and rejoiced in the post of honor before Kara's door, Karl felt unusually well-disposed toward old Michael, and he permitted the Duchess and Bradhurst to pass in without comment. Wisely, he reasoned that if they had come to rescue Kara and if they succeeded, both Michael and Peter would be disgraced—Michael for furthering the expedition—Peter for allowing the girl to be taken—and the "Griffin's" favor must needs descend upon *him*. That had come to be the only thing worth striving for in life for Karl—the confidence and trust of the crochety, uncertain old lady of "Balleyhoo."

So the drawbridge was raised again, and the gates were locked, and the little party (now reinforced by Karl) went noiselessly up the white path between the swaying hedges of roses. The Duchess had memorized her directions well, and with Michael's assistance, they soon had the little Tower-door unfastened and were within the castle. It was fitted up inside in perfect accord with its quaint exterior. Dull brass torches lined the walls, and from these the light fell, when Michael switched it on, as it would have fallen had they been really oiled strands and not electric lights. The walls themselves were fashioned of carved wood panels and rich old tapestries. The floors were waxed and polished until they reflected everything that stood upon them, and rare Persian rugs were strewn about; the chairs and stands and couches were of Teak-wood, inlaid. From the main hall, a great carved stairway ran upward toward the left, and formed a balcony running the length of the hall in the rear. From this, rugs and tap-

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estries hung; shields and spears and battle-axes—some very bright—some green and brown with age—were ranged at intervals. In the three niches of the stairway, complete suits of armor stood.

Bradhurst and Eleanore stood breathlessly regarding the wonderful room, quite forgetting their errand and the necessity for haste until Michael recalled them with a whispered warning, and led the way to the staircase. Then, the Duchess, remembering her instructions, counted the eleventh “spear-point” in the carving, past the third “crown” and pressed it downward. Instantly, the first four steps in the flight swung away, leaving an aperture wide enough for two persons to descend abreast, and beyond this aperture an electric dome simultaneously supplied light. Bradhurst entered, closely followed by the Duchess, whose eyes began to shine with the oddness of the adventure, and Michael and Karl, both long accustomed to the peculiarities of “Balleyhoo” brought up the rear. There was a sharp turn about three rods past

the point where they had entered the secret portion of the castle, and there, in the thickness of the walls, a narrow staircase leading upward. Three times during the ascent, they passed "look-out" places, commanding the "open" rooms of "Balleyhoo." The first was concealed in the glass eyes of a carved griffin, and it presented a view of the dining-hall; the second was cut in the eyes of a portrait, and it surveyed the library; the third commanded the music-room, from a wreath of carved roses in the cornice. It was clear that the "Griffin" had arranged for the dweller in these secret places to be aware of what went on in the rooms beyond. And many times they passed landing-places, leading off into tiny alcove-like rooms; but they had no time to stop and examine them. Old Michael announced, however, that there was an entire suite of rooms there, wherein the "Griffin's" grandchild could have lived for months undiscovered and in perfect comfort if the Prince's visits had been of any length. The bedchambers and nurseries


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were inaccessible except to the initiated, so there was no possibility of the little princess's things being seen; and though she had been permitted to wander about the entire castle and even through the grounds at will, the signal for the dropping of the drawbridge had always given her ample time to hide. Bradhurst felt an overmastering admiration for the old lady who had planned and executed this tremendous scheme, and he regretted that circumstances compelled him to cross her.

At the very top of the castle, there was a long corridor where Peter stalked back and forth before Kara's door. I should really have said "where Peter was *supposed* to stalk," for when the little party arrived breathless and eager at the top of the stairs, the old man was discovered peacefully asleep in one corner, and snoring sonorously. Michael and Karl regarded his helplessness with unholy joy, and warning the Duchess and Bradhurst to silence, they took their places, one at either side of Peter's recum-

bent form, ready to render him *non-combatant* if he should be so unfortunate as to awake. Bradhurst, meanwhile, obeying Eleanore's whispered directions, undid the secret barring of the door, and entered the Tower-room.

Kara had been warned by a note which Miss Mercury carried along with Bradhurst's evening greetings, and she had been sitting by the window that faced the bungalow, waiting patiently. But the silence had been too much for her, and the time had been too wearisomely long, and long before Bradhurst opened the door and stepped into her secret cell, the Hidden Princess had drifted off to dreamland, her arm across the window-sill, her cheek pillowed upon it, the moonlight pouring down upon her. She wore a gown of some soft creamy white stuff, that was really quite bride-like, and a wide, floppy, garden hat, trimmed with gardenias was pinned upon her wonderful hair. In her lap, lay her little bundle of love-letters, and a box of trinkets and mementos that she



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could not leave behind her; upon the back of her chair perched Miss Mercury, feathers primed and eyes fast closed. It was like the story of the Sleeping Beauty—the guard outside the door, the Hidden Princess in her Tower-room, the “Griffin,” the servants, even the pet pigeon perching upon the chair—all overcome by slumber. He tip-toed toward her and gazed down upon her, a faint smile upon his lips, and in his eyes something very big, and a little sad, but very good to see. And an instant afterward, he leaned over her, brushing aside the tendrils of shining hair, and he wakened her with a kiss, just as if she were really the Sleeping Beauty and he were the Prince of the Fairy Tale, dispelling the enchantment.

In a breath, they were hurrying down the stairs again, Eleanore and Kara and Bradhurst, while Michael and Karl lingered behind to carry Peter very gently into the Tower-room and leave him there to have his sleep out in the very cage he had been guarding. And then, entering the motor (Her

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Grace of Dunderry alone upon the rear seat this time) they crossed the bridge in wild haste and sped away down the road that led to Eden.

CHAPTER X
CUPID, VICTOR

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Michael and Karl, meanwhile, had made everything within the castle exactly as it had been before (except that Peter now lay secure in the Tower-room that had held Kara), and returning to the courtyard, they prepared to welcome the Prince. They sat upon the stone seats, one on either side of the gateway, smoking in silence, except for an occasional chuckle as they recalled some phase of Peter's unfortunate situation; now and then, Karl (who was *not* known as "the Silent"), would slap his thigh with a withered hand, and inquire of Michael if he had thought of this or that. They were in a merry mood—both these zealous servitors—though old Michael was perhaps the less merry of the two, for he remembered when

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the little Princess came to "Balleyhoo" with the strangely tragic woman that marriage had made of Louise Van der Griff, and he was trying anxiously to peer ahead into the years and see what they held for Kara.

But both old fellows were jolly enough, for weddings—especially the runaway ones—are surely not occasions for mourning; and it was pitiful to see how their spirits dropped when presently there came footsteps in the pathway behind them, and Margot, the "Griffin's" personal maid, arrived full garbed and breathless before them. She held up her fat dimpled hand to shield her eyes from the glare of the lantern they turned upon her, and called to them in a voice that might have held more dignity but for her great excitement and labored breathing.

"Is it you, Karl?" asked Margot, blinking. They had politely switched the lantern another way when they discovered her identity, and in consequence Margot found her-

self utterly blinded by the swift transition from light to darkness.

"Yes," admitted Karl, reluctantly

"Who is with you?" asked Margot. Michael removed his pipe slowly and announced that *he* was.

"Madame will receive one of you on the instant in her bedchamber," said Madame's messenger grimly. Michael looked at Karl and *he* looked at Michael, neither one very eager for the promised audience.

"You'd better be goin', Michael," said Karl generously. "I couldn't be leavin' the gate, with visitors expected."

"I'll watch the gate," said Michael.

"It's me as has been left in charge of it, Michael," said Karl, wagging his head. "I couldn't be leavin' it. It's me duty to stay."

"I'd advise you," said Margot impatiently, "to attend upon Madame instantly. She is possessed of the greatest excitement. It is not well to irritate her."

Karl cast a keen glance at Michael's stolid expression and grinned.

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"Come along, Michael," said he. "It's together we'll be facin' her. The fat's in the fire, this time, for sure."

"Someone must watch the gate," said Michael, puffing fiercely.

"We'll be turnin' on the alarum-bell as we go."

Michael rose hesitatingly, and started along at Karl's side. Up the white paths, they went, with Margot panting along behind them, and in through the wide portals. The "Griffin's" apartments were on the second floor, to the right—cut off from all the rest of the household—and thither they went, their knees almost shaking together with fear.

And in all truth, the "Griffin" was a figure to strike terror to the heart of the bravest beholder. She sat up in bed, a lace night-cap of huge and amazing proportions drawn over her white head, the lacey frills of it throwing the strong, almost masculine features into relief. Two thin plaits of white hair hung down on either side, over the

heavy, purple satin bed-jacket she had thrown about her shoulders. It was embroidered in golden griffins, and she had it carelessly fastened together in front with a diamond griffin half as big as her hand. This was a favorite ornament of hers, this griffin, and it usually betokened stormy weather. It had a very life-like expression—emerald eyes and a dreadful ruby tongue—and both Michael and Karl observed its presence with some uneasiness.

“Well!” cried the “Griffin” impatiently. “Out with it! Don’t stand there like a pair of Chinese figures. Something’s happened! I knew it when I heard the drawbridge and you didn’t report. Can’t you speak!”

“Yes’m,” said Michael, with the air of a school-boy, “somethin’ *has* happened, ma’am.”

“*Perrucini?*” asked the “Griffin,” sitting up, with a battle light kindling in her black eyes.

“Not—yit,” said Michael. She stared at him in amazement, and very gradually a

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sombre frown darkened her face. He quailed before it.

"It's the Princess, ma'am," he said weakly. "She's—eloped."

"*Eloped?*" repeated the "Griffin" weakly, sinking back among her pillows; then, to their utter astonishment, her face cleared, a grim smile slowly dawned, and she whispered with a distinct chuckle, "Merciful heavens—*already!*" They could scarcely believe their eyes. It was too absurdly incredible that she was able to smile—but there she was, plain enough, her bosom stirring with controlled laughter—and she looked so *far* from terrible, that hope sprang full grown in the hearts of her two old servitors.

"What happened?" asked the "Griffin" at last, sitting up, and pulling the bell-rope violently for Margot. "Tell me everything." She glanced from Michael to Karl and back again, for Karl motioned to the woodsman to explain—relying upon the silent one not to say too much. He realized

the risk he would run in attempting to tell the story himself. He *always* told just a little too much. Michael, on the contrary, was given to leaving something to the imagination.

"Lord Bradhurst come fur her in an automobile—with the Duchess," said Michael. "They knew the way in."

"I suppose Kara told them," murmured the "Griffin." "No—she promised never to tell. How *could* they have known?"

"Peggy told, ma'am," confessed Peggy's father flushing. "The Prince kidnapped her thinkin' 'twas the Princess—an' he frightened her till she told."

"Well?"

"The Duchess is visiting at the Prince's place. She found out that way an' told t'other."

"Who is the Duchess?" asked the "Griffin."

"Duchess of Dunderry. She's a friend of his'n. I reckon she comes from the same furrin town he does."

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"Humph!" cried the "Griffin," and turning upon Margot who stood patiently by, she ordered: "The black gown Ritori made. I'm rising at once." Margot gasped and stared at her mistress in astonishment.

"So they took her out of the strongest room in the castle without the least difficulty in the world," said the "Griffin" turning suddenly back to Michael. He paled. Karl showed a disposition to run.

"Where was Peter?" asked the "Griffin" grimly.

"Asleep, ma'am, in the corridor." Karl made so bold as to answer that question, smacking his lips over it; but the "Griffin's" next question left him almost paralyzed with fright.

"How do you know that? What were *you* doing all this time?"

"Just—followin' along," said Karl, meekly.

"So. You let them take her. You *helped*, I suppose," cried the "Griffin" fix-

ing him with her snapping eyes. "And you, too, I take it."

Michael nodded gravely. "Yes'm. We had t' get her out o' 'Balleyhoo.' "

"You *had* to?"

"The Prince calculates to come lookin' fur her after a bit," he explained calmly. "With what Peggy told him, I figger he'd 'a' been likely to *git* her, too."

Margot knelt, and slipping her hands under the covers, neatly covered Madame's feet with Madame's satin Juliettes.

"I suppose they are to be married in Eden," suggested the "Griffin" addressing Michael in a slightly milder tone.

"Yes'm."

"And then?"

"To the bungalow for supper?" Michael hesitated over the last word, never in his experience having met with people who supped in the middle of the night. The "Griffin" nodded.

"I shall want the big limousine," she said. "And see that Berry puts the green suite in

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order. Lord and Lady Bradhurst are staying here."

Michael and Margot and Karl regarded one another in wonder. They had never known the "Griffin" to accept defeat before, but she seemed to be almost rejoicing in this one. And only Margot suspected that it might not have been a defeat. But then, the others had no means of knowing that Madame had been examining legal documents that night, instead of sleeping, and that she had herself called Margot to the window to describe the motor-car and its occupants as they entered the courtyard. So Margot's wonder gave place, in an instant, to an admiration, quite boundless. She hadn't the least idea what Madame's reasons could be, but she suspected that the "Griffin" had anticipated the elopement—maybe had even helped to bring it about. Margot was well aware that opposition is love's most loyal ally.

An hour or so later, when Prince Per-

rucini crossed the drawbridge, accompanied by several friends and a few trusty followers, he was greeted at the gateway with the announcement that Madame was awaiting him in the main hallway. His surprise and disappointment were unbounded upon this indication that his plans were known, but he followed the servant to the main hallway, determined to put as good a face upon the matter as was possible, and there, sure enough, sat the "Griffin" in a high carved chair, arrayed in a gown of heavy black crêpe de chiné embroidered in black and silver. Her white hair was crowned by a quaint coronet of silver and diamonds and black enamel; black ear-rings swung from her ear-lobes; her ebony and silver cane rested upon the arm of her chair. Over the back of it, was draped artistically, her cloak of violet satin, and the effect was unspeakably regal. Perrucini, who had the European views of how a woman should be greeted, knelt at her feet and pressed his lips to her hand, but the "Griffin" frankly

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brushed her handkerchief across the violated member, and smiled at him grimly.

"You've still your monkey-tricks, I see," she said. "Welcome to 'Balleyhoo.' It's been quite a year or two since we've had the pleasure of seeing you here."

"From your appearance, it might have been yesterday," he said softly.

Her keen eyes swept over him from head to foot, carefully noting every detail, every new line, every added artifice.

"From yours," she answered frankly, "it might be *ten* years. You are failing rapidly, Oreste." He flushed a dark crimson, and his eyes flashed. For an instant, he looked almost like the youth who had come to her years before for Louise. But as the flush died and the fire vanished from his burnt-out eyes a feeling of pity for him crept into the "Griffin's" heart. It was so obviously not his fault—the sort of man he had become. It was the fault of his birth and rearing. But he was reaping the harvest of his wasted years. When she

spoke again, her voice was almost gentle.

"I suppose it's the old errand, eh?"

"Yes," he answered slowly.

"You are wonderfully patient. And your filial devotion has lasted a long time."

"We have always spoken plainly to each other," he said. "You know it is not filial devotion which prompts me. It is necessity. I see as plainly as you do, the alteration the years have made in me, and the road along which I am travelling." His voice dropped, his eyes widened and gazed wistfully into hers, and she marvelled to find how really moving he could make his plight appear. He was a born actor, for the art so controlled him, that even when he was most in earnest, he needs must act a part.

"How can I have any affection for my child?" he went on slowly. "I have never known her. Louise took her away from me when she was a child, and you have kept her from me ever since. If I am growing old in loneliness, you are to blame for it."

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She appreciated the cleverness of his attack, but she made no sign.

"I have always been grateful that it was a girl," mused the "Griffin."

"I also," said he. "Better that my poor name should die out utterly, than that I should have a son like me."

The "Griffin" nodded appreciatively and smiled at him. He had seated himself astride of a small carved chair, with his arms resting upon the back, and he had placed it with careful carelessness in such a position in regard to the light, that he appeared to the best possible advantage. He was an artist, in his way, was Perrucini.

"Oreste," said the "Griffin" gravely, "upon how much a year could you live comfortably, inconspicuously, and remain out of trouble?"

He stared at her, taken utterly unawares, then with a swift smile and a shrug he answered nonchalantly, "Oh—fifty thousand a year."

"I'll give you twenty," said the "Griffin,"

"twenty thousand every year that you remain inconspicuous, keep out of the magazines and newspapers and refrain from troubling Kara or me."

"It's not enough," said the Prince, shaking his head, and smiling faintly. "You forget how I have been born and raised, how I have lived all my life. It is too late, now, to change. I must have my little indulgences. If I cannot get them one way, it must be another."

"You labor, I think, under a false impression," said the "Griffin" patiently. "Kara is not here. I'm not offering you this money because I fear your power over the girl. She is quite out of your reach, now, for all time—as inaccessible as she was when I had her hidden here at 'Balleyhoo.' "

"What use to deceive me?" asked Perrucini. "I know the secret-places of 'Balleyhoo,' now."

"Go and look, then," said the "Griffin."
"See if you can find her."

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"She is not here?" asked Perrucini weakly.

"No."

"Where is she, then?" he asked. "Surely you—"

"She is probably, by this time, on the road between here and Eden."

"I will overtake her!" he cried, springing up. "I—"

"She is coming this way," said the "Griffin," interrupting.

He considered her from under lowered brows.

"I'm afraid—I fail to comprehend."

"She was married in Eden to-night to Lord Bradhurst. Consequently he is her legal protector, now, and not you."

"Lord Bradhurst?" he repeated, and then with lowered head and folded arms he stood motionless, lost in thought. The "Griffin" leaned forward in her carved chair, both hands clasped upon the silver top of her cane.

"So you see that I offered you the money,

knowing that you are no longer able to interfere with my plans concerning her," she said. "But Kara is entering upon a new life. Since she faces it with Bradhurst, the world will be generous with her. But if you were to be forever in the back-ground, things might be very hard for her sometime. You are such an uncertain quantity and your name is held in such ill-repute. Think! You can't have much love for the child, because, as you say, you have never known her; but you must have some feeling of tenderness for her. She is your own flesh and blood, after all. Stand out of her way, now; this is your only chance. And think of the comfort it will be to you, knowing that as long as you live and fulfill your part of the agreement, twenty thousand dollars will be paid into your bank every year—five thousand dollars every quarter."

He still frowned, his dark eyes fixed upon her face, and made no answer.

"You know how uncertain things have been with you," she said. "You know what

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is in store for you if you keep on going down hill as you've begun. This will afford you the chance to die like a man, Oreste."

A frightened look had crept into his eyes as she went on, and he seemed to shrink and to age before the thoughts her words called up.

"I'll take you," he said slowly, and then he drew a deep breath and clenched his hands.

The "Griffin" reached for the bell-rope.

"The papers are already made out," she said. "Michael and Margot can sign as witnesses. You waive all claims upon your daughter, and agree to my conditions. You can run through it until the servants come."

She extended the legal-looking document toward him, and Perrucini read it through almost at a glance. Then in silence, they waited for Michael and Margot and pen and ink. To the "Griffin" it seemed as though this was the one moment of her life. For

years she had dreaded the time when Kara must enter the world as the daughter of Oreste Perrucini. That she was also the grand-daughter of Mrs. Sarah Van der Grifft was something, but not enough to smooth the path entirely. So she had thought and thought over the difficulty, seeking to find a way out, when suddenly the advent of Bradhurst saved her the necessity of campaigning. She had only to sit back and watch as the little idyl moved to its climax—such a world old climax. She breathed a little sigh and smiled, for now, at last, Kara was secure. As Lady Bradhurst, with the Dowager Lady Bradhurst and Mrs. Sarah Van der Grifft as sponsors, her path would be smooth enough, and Perrucini's agreement would keep him clear of the field for a few years at least. By that time, he couldn't possibly matter.

Michael arrived a few moments later, bringing writing materials with him, and in less time than it takes to tell, the agreement was signed and witnessed, and the "Griffin"

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had given Perrucini his first quarterly check. Then Madame's car was announced, and upon the Prince's arm, she went slowly down the steps and started upon her way to the Bungalow, regardless of the scandalous lateness of the hour.

As you may imagine, the very last imperfection was removed from Kara's happiness, when the grim old lady arrived in time for the bridal supper. She welcomed Bradhurst as warmly as though she had never dreamed of having any other grandson-in-law, and later on, when the Bradhursts returned to London, the whole town went wild over Bradhurst's wife. And though they *were* married in haste, truth compels me to admit that they lived happily ever afterward, despite the old adage, for De Larres recovered from his wounds, but he did *not* mend the error of his ways—nor did Perrucini, for that matter. (They were *most* unsatisfactory villains in this respect.) And last of all, Cupid took a

holiday the day after the wedding, and celebrated the accomplishment of a very neat bit of work.

THE END







